

THE
HAPPY WOMAN
By MAURICE WEYL

To Frank Barrett
With best wishes
Maurice Weyl

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BY
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TO MY WIFE

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THE HAPPY WOMAN

CHAPTER I

AS Hardwick was shown into Mr. Pemberton's office, he was much impressed by the quality of exact appropriateness which marked its every feature. The room was almost bare of ornament. Not even a calendar was to be seen. The walls were of some dark fabric spaced by mahogany mouldings, the floor was covered by a self-effacing carpet, there were a few chairs. In the centre of the room stood a large mahogany desk covered by a piece of plate glass. On this desk were a telephone, an ink well and pen holder, and a blotting pad. There were no loose papers of any kind.

At the desk was seated a man of about thirty-five years, who fitted exactly into his surroundings. Efficiency spoke in his every feature. His hair was dark, his face square, his eyes keen, under somewhat heavy brows, his nose large but well formed, the mouth of fair size with rather thin lips, the chin firm. As he was seated, the impression that his height was considerably over the average was unavoidable. Actually it was about the average, and the impression he gave of tallness when seated was due to the fact that his legs were rather shorter than the size of his body suggested. His suit was dark in color, elegant and fashionable without reaching the extreme. The rest of his attire was also impeccable.

Hardwick took all of this in as a mass. The details were present but he did not see them as such. He felt the directness, the straightforward efficiency of the whole scheme, just as he was sensible of the temperature without noting that it was cool because of the half-opened window. He stood, hat in hand, awaiting some greeting.

It came promptly. "Good morning, Mr. Hardwick. Take a seat." The tone was firm, the utterance quick and clear.

Hardwick seated himself in the chair nearest Pemberton's desk and laid his hat on the floor.

Pemberton looked at him carefully. What he saw was a man of about forty-five, although the casual observer would have said that he was not quite forty. He was fair, with light brown hair in which there was no sign of gray. Nor was there even the beginning of baldness. His face was rather long, the forehead high. His eyes were gray, his nose aquiline and thin, a moustache covered what would have otherwise shown as a rather weak mouth, small in proportion to the rest of his face. His chin was not remarkable in any way. Perhaps it receded slightly.

He was well dressed without particular distinction. Altogether, his appearance betokened gentility. No one would ever have taken him for one of the so-called common people.

Pemberton noted some of these details, but what he

principally saw was that the man before him was one upon whom he felt that he could exert his own will with little effort. Pemberton made no attempt at analysis; he would have been at a loss to determine the elements which combined to produce his assumption, but, none the less, he was confident of its accuracy.

"I received your letter—" Hardwick began, questioningly.

"Yes," said Pemberton, "I wrote to you because Mr. Hughes, the president of the company, asked particularly that I should do so. I suppose you know that McNair, our advertising manager, has left us to go into the army. We have to fill his place with a new man because McNair's assistant, who, under ordinary circumstances, would have succeeded him, is also going into the army. Do you believe you are qualified to fill the position?" Pemberton put this question almost brusquely, looking directly into Hardwick's eyes.

"I've had a great deal of experience," answered the latter. "I was with the American Harness Company for three years; that was my last job. Before that, I was with the Pendleton agency. And before that I was with the Albright Printing Company as a solicitor for two years. And before that—well, I've had what you might call an all 'round experience. I know the game inside and out. Of course, I don't know the details of your particular business, but it wouldn't take me very long to get my bearings." Hardwick spoke easily and well, without overconfidence, modestly.

"Why did you leave the American Harness people?" asked Pemberton.

"They told me they were going to cut down their appropriation to a point where they would have to reduce the pay of the advertising manager about one-half. I couldn't stand that, so I quit."

"Brigham's got the job now, hasn't he?"

"Yes, I heard so the other day."

"Well, he's no cheap man."

"That's what I can't understand. I always thought that he was making more money than I was." Hardwick was becoming somewhat uncomfortable. Pemberton had hit upon a tender spot.

"Well," said Pemberton, "that's neither here nor there. It's not a question of what's gone before, but what we're going to do now. What salary do you ask?"

Hardwick hesitated for a moment before replying. "Mr. Hughes told me," he began.

Pemberton interrupted. "I know. Mr. Hughes told you that we paid McNair five thousand dollars. But we couldn't pay you anything like that. Certainly not to begin with. How much did you get at the Harness Company?"

"Four thousand," answered Hardwick promptly, "but you wouldn't compare that job to this, would you?"

"No; but you must remember you didn't keep that job. What would you say to thirty-five hundred to begin with?"

"I don't know," answered Hardwick doubtfully, "I'd have to cut down my living expenses considerably. And just now, with war prices, that's pretty difficult."

"But, my dear man, that isn't the question at all. Your living expenses must be made to fit your income. You can only count on getting what you're worth, not what you think you need. Is it a go?"

"Couldn't you make it four thousand?" Hardwick inquired in a tone which to Pemberton indicated conclusively that he would accept the smaller salary. "I'm sure Mr. Hughes—"

"Listen to me," interrupted Pemberton. "Let's get down to brass tacks. There are only two reasons for my considering your application. The first is that Mr. Hughes recommended you, but that was only a recommendation and not an order to employ you. If he had ordered me to put you on and pay you ten thousand, I'd have had no choice. Instead of that, he has simply suggested you for the job. I believe he's some relative of Mrs. Hardwick, isn't he?"

"He's her uncle."

"Yes. Well, he suggested that I see you and take you on if you suited me. To be perfectly frank, you don't suit me particularly well, and, if I had my choice, I really believe you wouldn't get the job. But the war has made men scarce everywhere and that's what gives you your opportunity. How about it?"

"I'd like a day or two to think it over," answered

Hardwick slowly. An indistinct idea that he might be able to get Mr. Hughes to improve the offer came into his mind. Pemberton guessed it and said:

"Well, if you want a couple of days to think it over, just consider that I've not made you any offer. That leaves both of us free."

"Yes," said Hardwick, slowly. He was thinking with great intensesness. He did not want this at all. He knew that he must not take any chance of losing this opportunity. He felt a dull anger against Pemberton grow within him. How hard he was. He would be a terrible task master. And yet, it was his one chance.

As he turned these ideas over in his mind, Pemberton watched him coolly, sure of the final decision. And after a little while it came.

"Coming to think of it," said Hardwick, very briskly, "I may as well accept right now. After all, it's only a start. If I make good, I guess there won't be any difficulty cashing in."

"Certainly not," answered Pemberton. "But let's have one thing understood right at the beginning. If you take this job, you're going to be under my orders, and I'm responsible for the work of your department. I want it understood that there is to be no use made of your wife's relationship to Mr. Hughes. You're not to try to work any pull. If you make good, your pay will be raised, and if you don't—well, I guess you understand." He smiled, but there was no mirth in it.

Hardwick was nonplused. This was exactly what he had intended to do; accept the position at the figure offered and then appeal to his wife's uncle for an increase. However, he was in for it now and there was nothing to do but acquiesce.

"Sure," said he, "it's got to be on that basis."

"Very well," answered Pemberton. "When will you begin work?"

"Any time," said Hardwick. "How about tomorrow morning?"

"First rate. See me here at nine-thirty." He was distinctly pleased with Hardwick's promptness, he had rather looked for some delay. He showed his pleasure plainly, and Hardwick knew that his first step had been in the right direction. He was still feeling sore, but, now that matters had been settled, much of the smart was gone. All of it left with Pemberton's next words:

"It's about lunch time. Will you join me? We can talk over our plans."

"I'll be glad to," answered Hardwick with alacrity. Pemberton did not seem such a bad fellow after all.

CHAPTER II

HARDWICK followed Pemberton into a restaurant of the latter's choosing, a place of the first-class frequented by business men. When they were seated in a room in which there was a minimum of bustle and a maximum of service, Pemberton asked:

"Shall I order for you?" and followed it immediately with:

"I don't suppose you eat a heavy lunch."

He turned to the waiter and gave his order without allowing Hardwick time to answer. Hardwick was much impressed. Never before had he met so masterful a man. It seemed that Pemberton took himself and his wishes for granted with everyone. He simply drove on in the way he wished to go. If anyone cared to risk a collision, it would be just so much the worse for him; Hardwick knew in his own soul that he would never be able successfully to oppose him. He did not admit it, even to himself; he simply felt the power of the other's personality, the thought of opposition would never occur to him. In fact, he did not consider Pemberton, for the moment, subjectively. He looked at him and his relations with others as a mere bystander, one who has but a detached interest in the proceedings.

When the waiter had gone, Pemberton turned to

Hardwick and told him his views with regard to the conduct of the advertising department of the Prescott Manufacturing Company, into whose employ Hardwick had now come. The company was engaged in the production of a number of hardware specialties. Its business was extremely large, covering the whole country, both by advertising and direct solicitation.

"You see," said Pemberton, "we advertise direct to the consumer and so have a hold on the ultimate customer. The dealer has to carry our goods; that is, he thinks he has to carry them, which is the same thing in the long run. But we want more than just having him carry them. We want him to push them. We want his good will, we want his interest. And so, we keep advertising to him constantly. Really, this work is much harder than the national stuff. That's just a case of getting good copy and a first-rate layout. At any rate the agency attends to getting them up and all we have to do is to pass on them. But to keep after the dealer without repeating ourselves too much, to keep him interested, that's the real job. If you can show yourself up to snuff in this particular, you're the man we've been looking for. And you won't have to stop at McNair's salary either."

The waiter arrived with their lunch and they were silent while it was being served. When the waiter departed they began their light meal uninterrupted by conversation. Hardwick was again much impressed by

his companion. He felt his directness, his incisiveness more keenly than ever. No longer did he resent it. On the contrary, he felt it as a distinct stimulus to himself. He thought that, under this man, the very best that was in him would come to the fore. He was quite serene now and so well satisfied with himself and his position in the world that he entirely forgot the awkward explanation he would have to make to his wife on his return home, a matter which had been troubling him but a few minutes before.

The silence was broken by Pemberton. "How did you ever get into the advertising game?" he asked, looking directly at Hardwick.

"Oh, I suppose I just drifted into it," answered Hardwick. He laid down his fork and thought for a few seconds. "Now that you ask me," he went on, "it's really quite a long story. I did drift into it, but, after all, don't you think most of our progress through the world is more in the nature of drifting than an intelligent conscious effort in a predetermined direction?" He spoke slowly, choosing his words with great care.

"I guess that's pretty good psychology. But, however it may have come about, tell me how you got into the advertising game."

"You know I'm a college man," said Hardwick. "My family were farmers all the way back. My father wanted his son to go to college, and, consequently, I went. Neither he nor I had any ulterior object. I was simply

to have an education which none of the Hardwicks had ever had. After I got my degree, I was supposed to come back to the farm provided I had no other ambition.

"But when Henry Wallace Hardwick saw his name in Latin on a parchment, the farm did not seem to offer a suitable career. None of the learned professions attracted me, I had no taste for any more plugging at books, so I decided for journalism. It wasn't hard to get on one of the local papers in this town, simply because young Allison was a classmate of mine and his father's word went a long way in the newspaper offices.

"I wasn't altogether a failure as a reporter. I liked the work. The irregular hours rather appealed to me. I seemed, too, to have a pretty good nose for news. The only trouble was the poor pay. But even that didn't bother me for several years, in fact, until I fell in love and wanted to get married. Say," he interrupted himself, "you don't want the story of my life, do you?"

"Go on," said Pemberton, "it's very interesting."

Hardwick ate a few mouthfuls and then resumed.

"Well, when I got to that point, I knew that I'd have to make a change if I ever wanted to earn real money. Have you any idea of what the average editor makes? I don't mean headliners like Brisbane, but the average."

"I have some idea," answered Pemberton, "go on."

Hardwick was becoming vaguely conscious of a feeling of friendliness towards his listener. He did not con-

nect it, at the moment, with his evident interest in his story, but that was the fact.

"I got myself a job in the business department, soliciting ads. I did pretty well, and before long I found I was making double what I had been getting as a reporter. My girl and I had agreed that we wouldn't get married until I was making fifty dollars a week, but we couldn't wait, and when I was up to thirty-five we figured that would be enough for the simple life we contemplated. And it was, too, back in '99; everything was much cheaper and I guess life was on a much simpler scale. I remember when I was a boy—but, I guess I'll cut that out, this story's too long already.

"Well, we got married and set up in a little house in the suburbs and found we had plenty. Really, it's the only time in my married life that I've been ahead of the game. Money in the bank and all that sort of thing. Not much, but plenty.

"And then my little girl came, and everything changed. I needed more money. My job as advertising solicitor was getting a little bigger every day, but the growth was slow and it seemed as though it would take years before I'd be able to make any real money. A good deal of my business came to me because I was pretty clever at getting up attractive layouts and that brought me several offers of jobs as copy man from customers. I fought shy of all of them because they seemed too small and I was looking for a bigger opportunity. I

thought I saw it in the printing business. It seemed to me that the printer could get a thousand dollars' worth of work while I was selling a hundred dollars' worth of space. I mean that a good scheme for an ad was only good for a moderate sized order, while one for an advertising booklet or a catalogue could run into a big lot of money. I met Johnny Albright one day and put the matter before him. He was interested and offered me a job, guaranteeing me as much salary as I was making and a commission besides. I talked it over with Mrs. Hardwick and although she wasn't in favor of making the change, she didn't have any good reason against doing it, just a kind of hunch that it wouldn't work out. I finally accepted Albright's offer.

"I did pretty well at the job. I always made a little more than my guarantee, but not enough to make it worth while. The printing business is an awfully hard game. It's like merchant tailoring; every customer wants personal attention and one man can only do about so much. Of course, there are some kinds of printing that run into pretty big money, but not the advertising kind. Either the agency gets all the profit or the customer is some piker who isn't big enough to have an agency handle his business, not to mention having a real advertising department of his own. But you know all about that."

"Yes," said Pemberton. "What made you quit Albright?"

"I came to the conclusion that all the real profit in the advertising business went to the agency. I had some fair sized customers who were just at the point where they could use an agency. I had done some business with Pendleton and, one day, I asked him how he'd like to take me on. When he found out I had some real live prospects, it was easy. I was with him two years. I had fully expected to get an interest in his business; in fact, he let me believe that when we made our original deal, but when I put it up to him at the end of the two years, by which time my customers had become his, he denied that we had ever considered that aspect when we had come together. I was so mad that I threw up my job then and there.

"I got the position of Advertising Manager with the Harness Company shortly after that, and you know the rest. It's not a very exciting history, is it?" he asked.

Pemberton did not answer immediately. He looked at his now empty plate, apparently deep in thought. Hardwick looked at him curiously. He would have liked to learn something of his history from his own lips. All he knew of him was that he had come to the Prescott Company from some Western town a few years before as assistant to the sales-manager, and that he was now the general manager of the business. He was considered by everyone to have quite extraordinary ability. His success had been simply meteoric. Apparently he had no close friends. He was unmarried and lived at the Mer-

chants Club, where he generally remained in his own room. He was supposed to spend all of his time away from the office at work, for, to all appearances, he never attended to any matters of detail while at the office. It was understood that there was never a paper on his desk. He seemed always to be up to his work, never behind.

"Do you care for a sweet?" asked Pemberton finally, ignoring Hardwick's question.

"No," answered the latter, "I'll just have a small coffee and a cigar, not too heavy."

Pemberton called the waiter and gave him the order. Then he turned to Hardwick and asked:

"Have you but the one child?"

"No, there are two: Alice is seventeen and Marian is fifteen. They're a great pair of girls." He beamed with pride. There was no mistaking the intensity of his love for his children. Pemberton noted it and was conscious of a slight feeling of envy. It did not seem reasonable to him that anyone should find so much satisfaction in what was, after all, a purely elementary emotion.

Hardwick was wondering what sort of question he might venture to put to Pemberton which would move him to tell something of himself. But all that occurred to him were rejected as soon as they presented themselves. Friendly as Pemberton had been, as had been shown by his lively interest in Hardwick's story, there was about him a reserve which appeared to be quite

impenetrable, certainly to his present companion, who, somewhat embarrassed by the silence with which his last remark had been met, went on to talk further of his family.

"I'd like you to meet Mrs. Hardwick and the girls. I believe you'd enjoy the kiddies; they're young and, if you'll pardon a doting parent, they're both clever and unspoiled. Will you come out to dinner some evening?"

"Thanks," answered Pemberton. "I don't go out at all. I'd like to come—perhaps I will later. Thanks very much."

There was just the least bit of hesitation in his manner. Slight as it was, almost imperceptible, in fact, it was the first sign of any such thing that Pemberton had shown to Hardwick.

CHAPTER III

AT five-thirty on that afternoon, late in May, 1917, Hardwick let himself into his house. It was a small, suburban dwelling, one of a row in which two commonplace styles of architecture alternated.

The door gave directly into a fair-sized hall, the furnishing of which is difficult to picture in words. To begin with, the walls were covered with a pale gray Chambray paper, which would have been entirely suitable in a bedroom, but which here was woefully out of place. The woodwork of chestnut had been stained to imitate yellow oak. The furniture was varied in the extreme. A couch of the Virginia Colonial type, covered with flowered tapestry, was the main feature, although strong competition was offered by the window seats, with cushions covered with bright red velvet. A mahogany Morris chair with tapestry cushions, two small chairs of the Louis XIV period in walnut, covered in French blue velvet, and a round oak centre table completed the list of the larger features. The general confusion was heightened by window draperies of a flowered tapestry whose strident colorings offered a sharp contrast to the equally strident but quite different tapestry used for the furniture covering. The floor was covered by what was probably the only Persian rug that ever faded.

It was an oppressive room. Pictures of all kinds were

everywhere crowded on the walls. No matter where one looked, some perfervid decoration seized the eye. Even the handle of the damper in the open fireplace was used to support a bunch of dried hydrangeas.

The centre table, literally piled with magazines and books, served as a hatrack as well. A sweater, some hair-ribbons, a girl's hat, some gloves were thrown on it in careless confusion. At one edge of the table there was a silver card tray, bearing quite a number of visiting cards, the top one being that of a distinguished society woman, Mrs. L. Percival Sedley. It had evidently held the post of honor at the top of the pile for quite a long period, for it was much soiled as well as distinctly dusty.

The sound of the closing door was followed immediately by the noise of steps on the oak stairs. Marian, a pretty young girl of fifteen, ran down to greet her father. Disregarding the fact that he was halfway out of his light overcoat, she threw her arms about him and kissed him affectionately.

"How are you, pops?" she cried.

"Fine, Mamie," he answered. "Is mother home?"

"Yes, and so's Allie. They'll be down in a minute, I guess. Did you get the job?"

"Yes," he answered, "I got it all right."

"That's fine, I'm so glad."

By this time, Hardwick had completely taken off his coat, which he threw on the couch with his hat and gloves upon it, and was about to mount the stairs when

his wife and elder daughter appeared at the upper landing.

Mrs. Hardwick was a large woman, not corpulent, but heavy, solid. Her hair was so arranged that it appeared to be black, although a considerable portion of it was gray. Her features were regular but tended towards magnitude. She would have been a handsome woman but for her complete lack of trimness. She wore a dress of dark blue serge which was crushed and wrinkled, and looked as though it was a total stranger to the pressing iron. Its general slovenliness was heightened by a number of spots, varying both in size and the intensity of discoloration.

"How are you, Henry, my dear?" she said, as she came down the stair. Her voice was not unpleasant, but her manner was unctuous. It seemed to be an affectation. Indeed, it had been once, but had now become habitual.

"All right, Florrie," he answered. "How are you? and you, Allie?" turning to his elder daughter, who approached him with her mother.

Both of the women kissed him, after which they all sat down, Hardwick in the Morris chair, with Marian sitting on one of its arms, her hand on his shoulder.

"Pops got the job," cried Marian.

"I made no doubt of it," said Mrs. Hardwick. "I knew that Uncle James' wishes would have to be respected."

"Uncle James' wishes did the trick in a way," said her husband, "but they didn't go as far as they might have." He paused, he was not comfortable at the prospect of admitting that he had accepted the position at thirty-five hundred dollars.

"What do you mean?" asked Mrs. Hardwick with great earnestness.

"Well—just this: You know I went to see the general manager, Mr. Pemberton, and when I spoke to him about the salary that Uncle James had mentioned, he wouldn't consider it, at least to start. Later, when we had lunch together, he told me that if I made good, I could have even more."

"What is the salary?" asked Mrs. Hardwick. There was a cold severity in her look and tone which indicated plainly that experience had taught her some lessons with regard to her husband, not all of which had been pleasant.

"Thirty-five hundred," he answered.

"Thirty-five hundred!" she exclaimed, not loudly, but with intense scorn. "You let him induce you to take the position at that salary?"

"It was the best I could do."

"Why, Uncle James said distinctly that the position paid five thousand."

"I know he did, that is, that was what Mr. McNair, my predecessor, got. But Pemberton wouldn't give that much to me to start."

"Who is this Pemberton, anyway? What right has he to presume to set aside Uncle James' promises? I'll speak to Uncle James about it."

"No, you mustn't," said Hardwick hurriedly. "That's one condition that Pemberton made and I accepted. He made it a distinct condition that I was not to use your influence with Uncle James to have my salary increased. He said it must depend only on my value to the Company."

"I never heard of such a thing." Mrs. Hardwick was becoming indignant. Her voice was just a shade louder.

Hardwick, who had learned by much experience, was silent. His wife looked at him for a moment, evidently expecting some word from him, but, when none came, went on:

"I hope you'll kindly point out to me how we're going to get along on thirty-five hundred dollars?"

"We'll have to figure that out," answered Hardwick, laconically.

"Ha, ha," laughed Mrs. Hardwick, scornfully. "That will take a much better mathematician, my dear, than I believe you are."

Hardwick was becoming angry, although he strove to remain calm. When his wife used this tone, accompanied by a peculiar little cackling laugh, it aroused an emotion which made him wish to do bodily injury to someone. By a great effort, he held himself in this time and said nothing. Not so his spouse.

"What's to become of Alice's going to college?"

"See here, Florrie," he said, striving to hide his irritation, "we don't have to settle that now, do we?"

"You don't want to go to college, do you, Allie?" said Marian with the idea of clearing the atmosphere.

Alice did not answer. She did want to go to college and her mother's question had brought her a lively sense of disappointment. Mrs. Hardwick, however, did not notice Alice. She was bent on venting her spleen and her husband's attempt, as she saw it, to dodge the issue but increased her determination.

"Marian," she said, sharply, "you will please be silent." Marian shrugged her shoulders and pouted. She could do this safely, for her mother was not looking at her. Instead she was fixedly regarding her husband, to whom she next addressed herself.

"That's you all over. If you can only postpone the decision of a question, you consider it as good as settled. This is really a very serious matter. My Uncle James," the accent on the word "my" still further exasperated Hardwick. "My Uncle James," she went on, "obtains for you a position in the Company, of which he has the honor of being president, at a salary of five thousand dollars, and you accept the position from one of his underlings at a little more than half of that extremely moderate sum. I'm sure I've always done my duty, I have shared your—"

But Hardwick could hear no more. When the partner

of his joys and sorrows embarked on a recital of the latter, he knew that to listen would cause him a loss of control which he would regret not only because he had suffered it, but also because it would open new vessels of recrimination to be poured on his already weary head. He got up and walked up the stairs to the bathroom, the door of which he locked after him.

Mrs. Hardwick was not content with this evidence of her victory but went on with the recital for the benefit of her daughters. The tone was now plaintive, mixed occasionally with the sarcastic, accompanied always by the cackling laughter which so annoyed her husband.

Marian paid her scant attention. She did not dare to leave the room as her father had done, although she devoutly wished that she were able to do so. Alice, on the other hand, listened to her mother with attention and sympathy.

The contrast between the two girls was striking. Alice, not yet fully matured, gave promise of inheriting the large frame of her mother. Her features were somewhat less salient than hers, but there was no doubt that, with the sharpening of age, they would have the same quality. Her hair was a light brown and her complexion was nondescript, being neither blonde nor brunette but partaking of the character of both. Finally, her only claim to beauty was youthfulness.

Marian, on the other hand, was distinctly pretty. She was a true blonde with delicate aristocratic features,

which as yet gave promise rather than represented final development. Perhaps, after all, the undoubted charm of her face was due to the vivacity of her expression rather than any approach to perfection of feature. She had the bright color of health and her petite though vigorous body proclaimed the healthy child.

Mrs. Hardwick's tirade lasted for about ten minutes. When she had completely exhausted the subject, which means that she had used up her temporary stock of complaint, indignation and sarcasm, she left the room and repaired to the kitchen to supervise the final preparation of their dinner by a small, rather incompetent maid.

As soon as the sound of her voice ceased, Hardwick came downstairs. He knew the storm was over for the present.

Some neighbors called during the evening and there was no opportunity to discuss the subject of Hardwick's new position until after their departure. By that time the two girls had retired.

When their guests had gone, Hardwick expected that his wife would revert to the subject. He was so sure of it that her silence made him somewhat uncomfortable. She spoke of sundry other matters which appeared to claim her interest but which had none for him. At length, when they were getting ready for bed, he took the first opportunity which presented itself to go back to the matter.

"Listen, Florrie," he said, "I'm going to do well in this

new job. It's going to be a matter of only a few months before I have my salary put on the proper basis. Of course, it's going to be awfully tight scraping for a little while, but I know it won't be long. I've never started on a new job with the enthusiasm that I have now. Perhaps it's the idea of working under Pemberton. Really, he's the most wonderful young fellow I've ever met. Clean cut, straightforward hardly describes him. He comes right out with what he has to say; no shilly-shallying of any kind. And he seems to guess what's in your mind almost before you know it yourself.

"I'm almost glad I'm starting as I am. Not the low salary, of course, although that won't be for long. But on the basis of going into a big, successful concern with a real advertising department and run by a man who knows what's what. At the Harness Company, they used to make me sweat for every cent that went into their advertising." He paused, and looked at Mrs. Hardwick for approval or sympathy. He saw that he had her attention, but neither the approval nor the sympathy that he craved. She said nothing, so he went on:

"I've never felt as capable as I do today. I'm brimful of energy and ideas. And ideas are what count. I'm going to show them a thing or two. If I don't make McNair look like a two-cent piece, my name isn't Hardwick."

"It's going to be awfully hard, Henry," his wife said, after a short silence. She had seated herself in an arm-

chair and was gazing into vacancy. She wore a subdued tragic impression. Hardwick's cue, impressed on him by many similar interviews, was an air of sympathetic interest and he acted on it.

"I suppose," she went on, "I can add to the family exchequer by my pen. Only today I was speaking on the telephone with Mr. Purnell, the editor of *The Times*, and he said he had been much interested in my essay on Rousseau. He saw it in the magazine and was quite lavish in his praise of it." She was quickening perceptibly.

The change of subject seemed to stimulate her and apparently made her forget her trouble of but a moment before. "I'm quite sure," she went on, "that Mr. Purnell would be delighted to have a series of articles from me on literary subjects. Of course, I should have to make some concession in view of the popular audience. I have long felt that the editors of our leading newspapers must feel that the cultural possibilities of their journals should be exploited. For instance,—" She was growing quite warm now and Hardwick knew that silent approval on his part would remove, at least for a day or two, all traces of her previous indignation. Therefore, he did not point out to her the well-known fact that newspapers were operated by their business departments with a view solely to making money and that there was no money in literature *per se*. To mention this would have brought on another argument and, uxoriously, Hardwick was a

"peace at any price" man. Wisely, therefore, he held his tongue.

"For instance," continued Mrs. Hardwick, "a series of short articles dealing in turn with the great names of the Victorian era could not fail to interest a large number of readers who are actually hungry for such pabulum. Only yesterday, I was speaking with Mrs. Hutchinson and she agreed with me entirely."

And so on. It was midnight before Hardwick got to sleep.

CHAPTER IV

PROMPTLY at nine-thirty the next morning, Hardwick sent in his name to Pemberton. The telephone operator in the outer office told him that Mr. Pemberton would see him in a few minutes and asked him to take a seat.

As he waited, he looked about him with interest. He was to be part of this smooth-running machine and he was happy at the prospect. It seemed to him that never had he seen an office in which there was so little lost motion. Everyone appeared to be working quietly, industriously, and yet without haste. There was no talking between the members of the office force within his sight except that which had the look of being part of their necessary work. Efficiency, directness, and order were the keynote.

His hopes surged high within him. Here was his opportunity. For the first time in his life, he was starting right. Always before, he had begun a new venture with high hopes, but each time he had not gone far before he had encountered insuperable difficulties. Either the opportunity for his best work was not present or circumstances beyond his control had cramped his effort. Even now, in the jubilation which he felt, he tried to persuade himself that it was merely the novelty which made him so hopeful, and that wisdom would suggest caution in

making his appraisal. But he could not convince himself, he could not down the sanguine expectation of real success which controlled him. Under a wide-awake, go-ahead man like Pemberton, with an organization keyed to the highest pitch, with a nation-wide distribution to dispose of the products of the factory, there could be but one result. The only question was as to his ability to handle the work allotted to him. And on that score Hardwick had no fear at all. He felt himself better and stronger than ever before, mentally as well as physically. He would be able, not only to do as good work as was expected of him, but better, much better. He would bring to it a wealth of experience of advertising in its every aspect and, in addition (he felt sure he was not overrating his ability), far more than ordinary ingenuity in the formulation of effective advertising campaigns. He rated himself no mean student of psychology, not in the academic sense, but in a practical way, as applied to his chosen work.

Optimism was a marked characteristic in Hardwick, and his imagination painted a brilliant picture of his future with the Prescott Company. Not a definite picture, with precise details, but by reason of its very indefiniteness, all the more colorful.

While he was thus pleasantly engaged, he was told by the telephone operator that Mr. Pemberton would see him now and he got up from his chair and walked into the business manager's private office.

Pemberton greeted him with a nod and motioned him to a chair. He made no apology for having kept him waiting. Strange to say, Hardwick did not expect it of him, although he would have been surprised at such action on the part of anyone else, perhaps because he, himself, was most scrupulous in the observance of all forms of courtesy.

"The advertising department," Pemberton began, "is temporarily in the hands of Miss Bernstein. She's been with us for several years and she knows every detail of the work thoroughly. She'll be your right-hand man and you'll find her most competent in every respect. I'll send for her directly and introduce you. You can then have her post you as to where the work stands."

Hardwick did not like the name of his assistant. It sounded Jewish, and he did not like Jews. In common with the rest of the world, he attempted to justify his prejudices by believing them to be judgments based on reason. In the case of Jews, he had no reason to offer which even he was willing to look upon as valid. He simply did not like them, that was all.

However, there was no sign of his feeling in the nod of acquiescence which he gave to Pemberton. He was all attention. Never had he been so much interested.

"There's no use of my giving you any instructions until you have gone over matters with Miss Bernstein. I'd like you to get the hang of things in a general way. You can put in the rest of the morning at that and see me here in this office at two-thirty."

"Very well," answered Hardwick.

Pemberton pressed a button at the side of his desk and a boy appeared.

"Send Miss Bernstein to me," he ordered.

In less than a minute the door of the office opened and a young woman appeared. She was about twenty-five years old, less than the average height and distinctly good-looking. While her face was not of the type that is most frequent among Jewesses, there was some elusive quality in it which made her name appropriate. She was a brunette, that is, her hair was a dark brown while her skin was fair, not the "peaches and cream" of the blonde, but still not the ivory color of the brunette. Her eyes were beautiful, large, limpid, gray in color. Her nose was aquiline and rather thin. Her mouth was not small, but it was well shaped with lips not too full. It expressed determination and character and was completely the reverse of sensual. Her chin was in proportion to the rest of her features. Her figure was beautiful, its slenderness and grace impressed themselves on Hardwick in spite of the almost primness of her self-effacing dress. Altogether, she expressed intelligence, keenness, activity, and, despite his prejudice against her race, he was delighted with her.

Pemberton introduced them and gave some general instructions. He wasted no time either in preliminaries or in any talk following the statement of his wishes. There was a finality in the tone he used in his last sentence that dismissed them.

Hardwick followed Miss Bernstein into the office of the advertising department. This was a large room with six flat top desks for clerks and one large desk by the window which proved to be his, for Miss Bernstein led him to it. Close by it was a smaller desk, one of the kind which holds a typewriter in its depths. This was her desk and she leaned against it, while he hung up his hat on a rack back of his chair, and waited for him to speak.

"I presume this is my desk," he said.

"Yes," she answered, "and this is mine. You needn't have it so close to yours if you don't want it. Mr. McNair had it brought here."

"We'll see about that later. Now, Miss Bernstein, I'm going to put myself into your hands. Just take it for granted that I don't know anything at all and tell me everything you can."

"Perhaps it might be better if you were to give me an idea of the order in which you prefer to take up the different parts of the work."

Hardwick noted the beauty of her voice. Its pitch was deep and most musical. Her enunciation was clear and she uttered each word distinctly. Her manner, while cordial, was quite impersonal. The thought came into Hardwick's mind that she was, in a way, a feminine counterpart of Pemberton, but a much softened Pemberton; the efficiency, the directness without the brusqueness, the almost-brutality.

"No," he answered, "just follow your own idea. If

there is anything which isn't clear to me, I'll ask you to explain. And when you're all through, undoubtedly I shall want you to tell me quite a lot of things."

"Very well," she said, and began an account of the methods of handling their business. She spoke without haste, expressing herself clearly and straightforwardly without any apparent effort to choose her words. Hardwick marveled at her grasp of the business. She seemed to be perfectly familiar, not only with all of the details, but with the general policy of the business as well, both as to the selling and advertising. From time to time, Hardwick put questions to her, to all of which she returned completely satisfying answers.

When the conduct of the advertising department had been thoroughly gone over, Hardwick said:

"Thank you very much. I think I have a general idea of how you do things. In the beginning, I'll have to depend on you for a lot of help."

"I'll be glad to do whatever I can, Mr. Hardwick," she said simply. He was again impressed by the impersonality of her manner, there was not the least vestige of coquetry; she seemed to be interested solely in her function as part of the advertising department. Her tone was pleasant but her look was altogether serious. He felt that she was quite an unusual kind of girl. A sudden idea seized him.

"I wonder why Mr. Pemberton didn't offer you the position of advertising manager."

"He did," she answered.

"Why didn't you take it?" he asked, really curious.

"I did not care to take the responsibility, and—" she paused.

"And what?" he asked, as she showed no disposition to continue.

"Oh! Just that," she said. Then, changing the subject, "Shall I get out those letters to the trade-papers?"

Hardwick saw that she did not wish to continue the conversation. He was disappointed, for his curiosity had really been aroused.

"Yes, please," he said and picked up some of the papers she had given him and set himself to mastering their contents.

This occupied him for about half an hour. When he had finished, he called Miss Bernstein and asked her for the files containing copies of the advertising matter they were using. She had it brought to his desk, and he spent the rest of the morning studying it carefully.

This was a subject in which he felt himself at home. For many years, he had been producing just this sort of thing. What he had before him he found good, well executed but lacking in imagination. It was too prosaic by far; it seemed to take too much for granted. He knew he could do better and his confidence of success was again heightened. This would be easy to beat. He would show them stuff that would bring results; he would compel Pemberton's approval.

He sat back in his chair and thought; a hundred ideas seemed to be clamoring for attention. He was so engrossed that the sound of Miss Bernstein's voice startled him.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Hardwick," she said. "Mr. Cummings, the representative of the hardware trade journal, is here. He asked for Mr. McNair. Do you wish to see him?"

"Yes," answered Hardwick, "send him in." He was pleased at the prospect of meeting Cummings, whom he had known for years. He craved the latter's admiration of his success in becoming advertising manager of the Prescott Company.

The visitor came to him in less than a minute. There were the usual salutations, felicitations and conversation appropriate to the occasion, ending by an agreement to lunch together.

Hardwick returned to his desk at two o'clock and spent the next half hour questioning Miss Bernstein as to various details of their work. She again answered all of his questions to his complete satisfaction, showing the most intimate knowledge of the business in every detail within the scope of his questions. Again he marveled at her ability, and, above all, at the complete absence of self-consciousness which she displayed. Her mind appeared to be a registering machine which functioned quite independently of her intimate personality. At least, so it appeared to Hardwick, to whom it did not

occur that perhaps this very absorption in the minutiae of her work might be her greatest interest.

Promptly at half-past two, he telephoned to Pemberton's office and learned that the latter was ready to see him.

Pemberton was sitting at his desk. As usual, there was no evidence of any activity on his part. There were no papers in sight; in fact, the fantastic thought crossed Hardwick's mind that, as far as evidence to the contrary went, nothing might have been done by Pemberton in the nearly five hours that had elapsed since he last saw him.

"How are you getting along?" Pemberton asked. He did not invite Hardwick to sit down. However, something in his tone encouraged the latter to do so. It appeared that Pemberton was not prodigal of small acts of courtesy although, at the same time, his omission of them was without the accentuation necessary to imply rudeness.

"I'm getting the hang of things, thanks to Miss Bernstein. She seems to know everything."

"Yes; she's a most unusual young woman. However," Pemberton went on hastily, almost as though he regretted his slight divagation, "you'll require a few weeks to become acquainted with all the details of the work. In the meantime, you will depend more or less on Miss Bernstein." He eyed Hardwick keenly. Evidently, he was looking for something in the latter's expression, but, whatever it was, it was known only to himself.

"I want to give you a few general instructions only," he went on, after the briefest pause. "It is not my custom to interfere with any man's work. You have your own idea of things, and the only way you can work well is according to this idea of your own and not somebody else's. On matters of general policy, I expect to be consulted. Outside of that, within the limits upon which we agree, you will be your own master. I judge by results only. I shall not criticize your way of obtaining them.

"However, I want you to report to me from time to time, giving me an idea of what you are doing. You will also attend the weekly conference of heads of departments, every Monday at two-thirty, in the directors' room." He paused again. After a moment of silence, Hardwick said:

"Very well, Mr. Pemberton," and made as if to go.

"Wait, I'm not through. You are going to buy quite a lot of printing. I don't suppose it is necessary to tell a man of your experience how to do it, but I'm going to say a few words on the subject. There is nothing more difficult to buy right. I won't go into details, there are too many of them. I'll only tell you that, in the long run, you'll get from the printer just about what you pay for. The proper course is to decide exactly what you want in advance, down to the last item, and buy it from someone who really can furnish it at a fair price. You have been in the printing business yourself and you know just what I mean, so there's no occasion to go into any fur-

ther details. All I'll say is: Don't leave it to the printer.

"Another thing—I saw you at lunch today with Cummings. My advice to you is to keep as free from the people you do business with as you can. You know just what I mean, so we'll not discuss that matter any further." He got up from his chair, which was a sign that the interview was over. Hardwick left, feeling somewhat uncomfortable.

CHAPTER V

BY Thursday of the following week, Hardwick had laid out a campaign of direct advertising to the retail dealers. He had worked very hard at it, both in the office and at home, late into the night. He had planned every detail and had brought to the task the best that was in him. Never had he been more interested. It was not only the newness of his position which made the work attractive; he had as well a strong incentive in his intense desire to win Pemberton's approval.

He had had no occasion to go to the latter's office since his visit on the afternoon of his first day with the company. He had seen him at the conference of heads of departments on Monday but had not spoken to him. Pemberton had introduced him to the men, and Hardwick had said a few words to them, devoting himself almost entirely to a plea for their co-operation. His manner was modest and he made an excellent impression.

On Thursday morning he submitted his work to Miss Bernstein. She went over it with him with great care and evident interest. She made no comment, which disappointed him, as he was anxious for praise. It occurred to him that she might be held from an expression of opinion by shyness, feeling that it would be presumptuous to offer it without being asked. So Hardwick put the question:

"What do you think of it?"

"I think it's excellent."

But that was all. Hardwick had hoped for some enthusiasm.

During the morning, he went over the whole matter again in fine detail to assure himself that he had not overlooked anything, and, when he was through, he telephoned to Pemberton for an appointment. It was set for four o'clock that afternoon.

Pemberton examined his layouts and listened to his explanation with interest. He asked a number of pointed questions, to all of which Hardwick was able to make prompt and satisfactory answers. When the whole matter had been gone over thoroughly, Pemberton said:

"That's all right, Mr. Hardwick, I have no suggestions to offer."

Hardwick was elated. He had had no expectation of praise from his superior, that is, an expression of admiration. From a man like Pemberton, unqualified approval was the highest praise.

On Friday, he called in several printers, to whom he submitted his layouts and asked for estimates on the work.

Among the bidders was his former employer, Albright. The latter took it for granted that their previous association would make him a preferred bidder, and intimated as much to Hardwick.

"Nothing doing, old man," said the latter. "There

are going to be just four bidders on this work and they're all going to have exactly the same specifications. You'll have just one chance to bid. Any one of the four I've selected can do the work right. You'll have nothing to figure on that can't be specified exactly. All designs and engravings will be furnished by us, and the specifications will be complete. I'll see to it that there will be no chance for any misunderstanding."

"Who are the other bidders, Harry?" asked Albright.

Hardwick mentioned them. "I guess they're all O. K., aren't they?" he said.

"Oh, I suppose so. I don't think any of them are in our class."

"Well, they suit me, and if you think they're not in your class, perhaps you'd better not bid at all, because I'm going to consider their bids right alongside of yours."

"All right, I'll take a shot at it. Let's see the stuff."

Hardwick showed it to him. When all necessary explanation had been made, he called Miss Bernstein and offered to introduce her to Albright, but it was unnecessary; they had met before.

"I'm going to put this whole job in Miss Bernstein's charge," said Hardwick, "you can see her about it in future. It's out of my hands."

Hardwick had several reasons for this action, but the most important was his desire to hold to the letter of Pemberton's advice to keep himself free from the people with whom he would have to do business. He did

not altogether mistrust himself, but he felt that he was almost too well acquainted with all of the bidders, having met them frequently in his long association with the printing and advertising business. In fact, he felt rather under obligations to some of them for favors of various kinds in the past and he preferred to set up a buffer between himself and them.

Miss Bernstein displayed neither pleasure nor vexation at having this work thrust upon her. She accepted the task as part of the routine.

The girl puzzled Hardwick greatly. In his long business experience, he had naturally been thrown much into association with women. As a rule, they were willing workers, doing what was allotted to them to the best of their ability. Most of them had no real interest in their work beyond the desire to do it well enough to hold their positions. Their real lives were elsewhere. Their one ambition being marriage, their work was merely a temporary affair. Most of them had either fiancés, generally men who would not be in a position to marry for a long time, or else had a number of possible suitors, none of whom was finally committed. And the greater part of the remainder were on the look-out.

But whatever their state with regard to their matrimonial expectations, the vast majority of them never entirely sank their sex in their business. They could not be accused of outright coquetry, but they would never let it be forgotten that they were women first and employees second.

But this girl was all business. It was evident that she knew nothing else within the office, whatever her life might be outside of it. She brought to her work an intense interest that seemed to warrant the conviction that it was her true vocation. Almost constantly associated with her, Hardwick never ceased to wonder at her complete absorption in her work.

His was a genial nature. He enjoyed the companionship of those with whom his business brought him into contact. There was very little reserve in his manner. He enjoyed joviality and was jovial himself. It had always been his custom to be on the most friendly terms with all of his associates in business, of whatever rank.

But intimacy seemed impossible with Miss Bernstein. She responded to his morning greeting politely but in a manner which cut off the possibility of further friendly conversation. Although she attracted him, he had no ulterior motive in desiring to be on a friendly footing with her; it was simply because it was his nature. Her complete reserve intensified this desire by making special what otherwise would have been merely general.

As yet, he scarcely knew the other women in his department. With one exception, Miss Henderson, a stenographer, they were mere clerks doing the most perfunctory kind of routine work, and there was no occasion for him to come into direct contact with them. They received their instructions from Miss Bernstein.

On Friday, after the latter had gone out to lunch,

Hardwick, who had been dictating some letters to Miss Henderson, fell into conversation with her. It began through his giving her some instructions.

"When those last two letters are written," he said, "will you please give them to Miss Bernstein?"

"Will she sign them?" she asked.

"No; I merely want her to go over them to verify certain details."

Miss Henderson made no answer. As she sat there, apparently awaiting either further dictation or dismissal, Hardwick, unaccountably to himself, was moved to say:

"She's a very bright girl, isn't she?"

"Yes," answered Miss Henderson, rather grudgingly, it appeared to Hardwick.

"You seem to think I overrate her," he remarked, eyeing her.

"Oh! no," she made haste to answer. "She's bright enough, but she's awful queer."

"Queer? How?" Hardwick's curiosity was aroused.

"Oh! I don't know. She's kind of high and mighty; seems to think she's better than the rest of us. Her!" this last scornfully. She had been looking at her notebook, but now she raised her eyes and looked directly at him. He noticed that she was quite a good-looking young woman, not noteworthy in any particular, just the ordinary type, with fairly regular features, dark hair and a fair complexion, altogether commonplace and

yet she was not unattractive, as she sat there in her neat waist and skirt which bespoke the care she gave to her appearance.

"You know she's a Jew," she continued as Hardwick said nothing.

"I imagined so," he answered. "Has she been here long?"

"Ever so long. Four or five years, I guess."

"You say she's 'high and mighty.' What do you mean?"

"Oh, I don't know. She never has a word to say to any of us outside of business. She acts just as though we were dirt, not fit to associate with her. Of course, she's been here longer than most of the rest of us, and the boss is crazy about her—"

Hardwick interrupted. He was intensely interested.

"The boss! Whom do you mean?"

"Why, Mr. Pemberton, of course," she answered with a smile. She was delighted to find him so much interested. His evident amazement was most pleasant to her.

"You surprise me," he said, "aren't you mistaken? Mr. Pemberton seems interested only in business. You must be mistaken."

"No, I'm not. I guess I've got eyes."

"And an imagination, too, I take it."

His words had exactly their intended effect. They spurred her on to give proof.

"Imagination nothing," she said. "It's Miss Bern-

stein here and Miss Bernstein there with him. Nobody else can do anything right but Ruth Bernstein, Humph!"

"Is her name Ruth?" queried Hardwick.

"Yes; Ruth Bernstein. Have you never noticed the way he looks at her? It's a regular give-away. If a man looked at me like that, I'd have visions of a solitaire." She got up from her chair, triumphant. She knew that she had incited real interest and it was balm to her spirit.

"If you're through," she said, "I suppose I may go to my lunch."

"Yes, thank you, quite through."

He sat at his desk for a while after she had left, pondering over what she had said. Could it be true that Pemberton was interested to this extent in Miss Bernstein? It did not seem possible. He would be the last man in the world to mix affection and business. Affection and Pemberton! The two seemed utterly incompatible. And yet, Hardwick thought, the man couldn't be all business, there must be something in his life besides his grinding efficiency. There must be another side as well, and this might be it. Still, it seemed completely foreign, altogether removed from the Pemberton that he knew, the business machine, all efficiency.

Efficiency. How he hated the word. Its sudden widespread use made it sickening to him. The whole meaning of it, as it was generally taken, was opposed to his ideas. It stood for something mechanical, limited, unimaginative.

tive. It crushed the humanity out of mankind. It set them to tasks as one would start a machine, to function regularly without a break, without the slightest divagation, without rest, without vision. And he saw Pember-ton as a machine, a complex mechanism driven steadily with but one end in view, untouched, unimpressed by anything which did not contribute to the result he sought.

And to think of this machine, this business-building monster in love with an office girl. It was absurd. The Henderson girl, out of pique perhaps, for some silly reasons surely, had imagined this. She had construed Pemberton's lack of rudeness to a really superior female clerk as evidence of a most exceptional regard for her. The whole thing was absurd.

He left his desk and went to his lunch.

CHAPTER VI

ON Saturday afternoon, Hardwick came home at about half past three. It was the first week in June, and, as he walked from the car to his house, he noticed the roses in bloom in a number of the little gardens fronting his neighbors' houses. He was not a particularly observant man, things of this sort seldom claimed his attention. As a rule, he was entirely engrossed in his own thoughts and literally had to be pulled out of them.

But today he was utterly at peace with the world. At the office, he had spent a most satisfactory morning. The new advertising plans had occupied him from his arrival until closing time, and he had had the joy of feeling that his work was good. Actually, he had disregarded the usual closing time and had remained at his desk until half past two, perfectly happy in his complete absorption in his task. When he was finally through with it, he had enjoyed a leisurely lunch and had then taken the trolley to go home.

The gaiety of the roses fitted exactly into his mood. He felt, vaguely, of course, that they were a symbol of his success, that they offered a promise of the fine career that was at last open to him. And then he smiled at his own fancy, at the exuberance of spirits which made him invent so fantastic, so whimsical an idea.

He entered the oppressive hall of his home without any sense either of its overburdened furnishing or its usual disorder. He was accustomed to it just as anyone is used to a peculiarity of his own countenance. He whistled as he closed the door as a signal of his arrival.

An answering whistle from Marian was followed almost immediately by the appearance of the girl herself, running down the stairs at break-neck speed to throw her arms around her father's neck.

"How are you, pops?" she cried, between kisses.

"Fine, Mamie," he answered. "Where's mother?"

"Upstairs. Allie's out."

They went upstairs together to a small room, the name of which indicated that it was intended to be used for sewing. Indeed, there was a machine in one corner but the dust upon it justified the belief that it had not been in operation for quite a long time. The appearance of the room, moreover, was proof positive that its principal use was for storage, for the lines of hooks upon the walls were filled with all sorts of wearing apparel flung together in great disorder.

At a small table by the window, Mrs. Hardwick was seated, writing. About a dozen sheets had already been filled and she was half through another. As Hardwick and Marian entered, she turned, pen in hand, and greeted him.

"How are you, Henry, my dear?" she said in her usual unctuous tone.

"Splendid," he said, as he kissed her. "Isn't it a beautiful day?"

"Isn't it?" she said in confirmation.

"What are you writing?" he asked.

"Just a little study of Fielding's work. It's the first chance I've had to get at it and I've thoroughly enjoyed the little I've been able to do. It's really most fascinating. It is my purpose to show the complete modernity of Fielding's point of view, his realism. I believe that work of this character will undoubtedly open the minds of many people to a whole great literature which is neglected by them, simply because they feel that it is utterly out-of-date." She paused.

"No doubt," said her husband, although he was more than doubtful. "Where's Allie?"

"She went over to see Mary Frothingham. She'll be back in time for dinner," answered Mrs. Hardwick, turning back to her work. Her husband had already left the room when she called to him.

"Oh, Henry! There's a letter for you on the chiffonier."

"What is it?"

"It's from Maguire. He wants his bill paid. The letter is quite insolent."

All of Hardwick's peace of mind vanished. This bill, already three months overdue, brought a swift recollection of many others, likewise unpaid, whose total reached a figure, for him, quite staggering.

He came back into the room and sat down. He felt

helpless, oppressed by the sense of a great load. How much did he owe? Would he ever be able to liquidate the debts which he felt were crushing him? Mechanically, he began to count them and each one that he added suggested others. His mind was confused, a sort of dull desperation seized him. They must economize, he thought, they must get some money somewhere.

"Listen, Florrie," he said at length as his wife went on writing placidly, but with an indescribable mannerism which seemed to convey the information that this was the work of a superior intelligence. Whenever Mrs. Hardwick entered the domain of her own intellectuality, she was a different woman, she was conscious to the finger tips and every part of her shouted "Behold!"

She turned to him at the sound of her name.

"What is it, my dear?" she asked, indulgently, as though it was a great concession on her part not to resent an interruption while she was engaged on work of such importance.

"I want to talk over our affairs. This bill of Maguire's —" He paused, not knowing which other to name first.

"How about all the other bills?" she asked. There was a slight note of scorn in her voice which portended a coming storm.

"It's just those other bills I want to talk about. We'll have to take some steps to pay them."

"What do you suppose induces me to write these articles?" she said. "I'm trying to do my share."

"I know that and I appreciate it," he said earnestly, "but we must do more. Can't we economize in some way?"

"Economize!" she exclaimed. "Have we ever done anything but economize? I haven't a single gown that is fit to be seen. Not that it makes any difference to me." Here she uttered that cackle of forced laughter which drove him nearly frantic.

She went on: "And the girls! Alice is of an age at which her dress is a matter of importance if she is to move among the right sort of people. Marian is only a child, it is true, but even she is literally in rags. Economize!" She paused for breath.

"My clothes are all right," put in Marian, who had been standing by the door, an interested listener.

Neither of her parents paid any attention to her remark. Hardwick would have liked to save her from hearing this discussion, but felt too weak, too much at a loss to be able to ask her to go away or to postpone further talk on the subject.

"How do other people get along?" he asked bitterly. "There's Sedgely, he doesn't make a cent over twenty-five hundred, and he's always flush. And Briggs, I'm sure he makes no more than that and you know how well they appear to get along."

"I suppose I'm to understand from that that I'm extravagant; that I waste the princely allowance which you make to me." Her manner was icy, but her heat was evident.

"Not at all, Florrie. Don't put it on that ground. Let's talk this over calmly."

"Calmly," she cried. "Could anybody be more calm than I under such provocation? For the last ten years I've put up with insufficient funds to run the house; I've economized in every way; I've never considered myself and, at every turn, I am accused of extravagance, of squandering the pittance which you give me."

"Please, Florrie," he pleaded. "We'll never get anywhere on that ground. I know you're not extravagant; that you do the best you can. But what I want to discuss is whether there isn't something we can cut out. It won't be for long."

"Does it never occur to you that you might earn a little more? I don't know what's the matter with you, but other men of your years and experience, with no more brains than you have, earn twice or three times as much as you do." Her tone was biting. He lost patience.

"I do the best I can. I give you every cent that isn't absolutely necessary to me. I smoke a pipe. I buy cheap clothes, we never go anywhere. Almost all of my money goes to you and any saving that we can make must come out of our living expenses and we must cut them down somehow."

"Perhaps you'll show me," she said with scorn. "I know I never miss an opportunity to save. I bought that washing machine to save the pay of a laundress—"

"Yes," he interrupted, thoroughly angry now, "you

paid a hundred and fifty dollars for that washing machine and you have the laundress besides. You save at the spigot and waste at the bung."

"Of course I'm in the wrong," cried Mrs. Hardwick. "I—I—" she was at a loss for a moment what to say next, so she resorted to her cackle. But it was no longer of the same pitch as before; it was higher now and more piercing. "I've always been in the wrong; I've always wasted your substance; I've slaved; I've worked like a dog—Why," she said, as a sudden thought struck her, "we're even living in *my* house, the house that was bought with the money that came from *my* parents—"

"Yes," he answered, angrily, "*your* house, if the equity in it is worth considering as property. By the way," he added, "did you pay the mortgage interest?"

"No," she answered, "you didn't give it to me."

"You know your allowance is supposed to take care of that. We arranged that at the beginning." He felt utterly outraged. This was the last straw.

"I'd like to know how I'm to pay mortgage interest out of what you give me. It's scarcely enough to pay grocers' bills."

He made no answer but sat moodily silent. Not so she.

"You had an opportunity to take the position my Uncle James obtained for you at five thousand dollars and you let a mere underling engage you for thirty-five hundred. Perhaps you do not consider that extravagance. Perhaps you would call it generosity."

Hardwick could stand no more. He left the room, followed by Marian, and went into his bedroom. He seated himself in the armchair, utterly dejected. His anger was almost lost in a feeling of complete defeat, but, from time to time, it regained control of him. He felt that his wife did not use him fairly, that she was indifferent in matters of essential economy. The washing machine was a fair sample, all over the house were evidences of mismanagement of the sort. The money went and they had nothing for it.

Marian had followed him into the room without his observing her entrance. She watched him for a moment, sympathizing in his evident distress, and then went over to him, sat on the side of his chair and put her arm around his neck.

An immense surge of love engulfed him. No word could have done for him what this simple mark of affection brought. Ah! She was his, she loved him without thought, without calculation, just because she loved him. He smiled at her and took her other hand.

"Let's go for a walk, pops," she said. "It's a lovely day."

"No, dear," he answered, affectionately, "I don't feel like walking. Besides, I've some things to think about."

"Oh! Please come. It'll do you good. And it won't do you a bit of good to sit there thinking of those nasty, horrid things. Please." She looked at him appealingly. He could not refuse.

"All right," he said, "get ready."

"Fine," she cried as she got up after kissing him. "Mother!" she cried, "pops and I are going out for a walk."

She did not wait for an answer but ran downstairs followed by her father. They were on the street almost immediately.

For some time, Hardwick walked along with Marian, without saying a word except an occasional "yes" or "no" in answer to her prattle. They went towards the open country which began about a half mile from their house.

By the time this distance had been covered, he felt distinctly better. In fact, he found, to his amazement, that he was actually enjoying himself. He could think about his debts another time. There was nothing new in the condition of debtor for him and he wondered why he had been silly enough to let it depress him.

"Look," he said, suddenly interrupting her account of the stupidity of one of her teachers, "look at that flock of birds there. I suppose they're migrating. I wonder what they are."

"Warblers," promptly answered Marian. "Aren't their colors wonderful?"

They stood still for a moment looking at them until the birds had gone. Then they resumed their walk in silence. Presently Marian said:

"How old was mother when you first knew her?"

"About twenty," he answered.

"What was she like then?"

"How do you mean? How did she look?"

"Yes, how did she look?"

He thought for a moment. "It's pretty hard to describe how anyone looks at any time, but twenty years ago—that's a long time."

"Was she very pretty?"

"I thought she was beautiful. She looked something like Allie does now. If anything, she was better looking. But I don't really know how she looked, I only know how I thought she looked. You've seen the photograph of her in her wedding dress."

"Yes, I know. I guess I didn't mean that I wanted to know how she looked to other people, but how she looked to you."

"Well, you see, I was a young man and in love, so she had to look beautiful to me."

"Were you terribly in love?" asked Marian with the greatest interest.

"I suppose so. It's been a long time since then."

"Oh! Please tell me about it," she cried.

"There isn't much to tell. I was a newspaper reporter then. I met her one evening after the theatre; there was a little party of us that went to one of the girls' houses, I don't remember which. Mother and I got to talking and we found each other very interesting. She asked me to call on her and I lost no time in doing it. After that, it was the usual story." He paused.

"Tell it to me," she said.

"Well, after I'd been calling on her a few months, we were engaged and in about a year we were married."

"Tell me how you were engaged."

"I don't remember exactly. It seems we just fell into it. Some time or other I must have spoken to her telling her how I felt, but I don't remember just how it came about. You see, there wasn't anything sudden about it."

"Was she very sweet?"

"I thought she was." He paused for a moment and looked up at the sky as though he was trying to revisualize the past. "Yes, she was," he added with conviction.

"Tell me about her," said Marian earnestly.

There was no doubt of her intense interest.

"Well, you know she was an only child, and her parents did everything they could to spoil her. I didn't know anything about it at the time, of course. I thought they were very rich and I guess almost everybody else did, too. They lived very well and mother was brought up in what was considered luxury in those days. And when your grandfather died and we found out that he hadn't a cent but was heavily in debt, nobody was more surprised than mother. You see, she had always imagined that her folks had a lot of money. Maybe they did have once, but it must have been long before I knew them. Mother always was used to having servants wait on her and all that sort of thing."

"But it didn't spoil her, did it?" asked Marian as he paused.

"No," he answered slowly, "I don't think so. When we were first married, I used to wonder at her getting along so well on the small salary I made. But she did it, all right."

"Was she always so smart?" inquired Marian.

"What do you mean?"

"Oh! Could she always talk so—so beautiful?"

"Beautifully, do you mean?"

"Yes, beautifully," answered Marian, accepting the correction.

"She always had the 'gift of the gab,' as they say. That was one of the things about her that struck me at the time. She talked so much better than anyone, certainly any girl I had ever met."

There was a short silence, as they walked on, and then he turned to Marian suddenly and asked:

"Say, what's making you ask all of these questions?"

"Oh! I don't know. I was just thinking."

Hardwick saw what was in the child's mind and did not press his question. They walked along in silence for a few minutes.

"You have an awful hard time, don't you?" Marian said at length.

"I don't think so," he replied. "I'm really very happy most of the time, particularly when I think of what a fine family I have, all except my younger daughter." He smiled at her.

"You're a mean old thing," she said, taking his arm and pressing it tightly.

CHAPTER VII

JAMES KNOWLTON HUGHES was a favorite of fortune. In his case there was no evidence of the fickleness which is usually ascribed to this much abused jade. From his earliest youth, she had showered upon him every material benefit, while he, with customary human obliquity, had ascribed his success to his own ability. He considered himself entirely self-made.

The quality of acquisitiveness was an overmastering character in James Knowlton Hughes. He had wanted wealth always more than he had wanted anything else. It was as natural for him to seek the golden source as it is for a *Helianthus* to turn its face to the sun.

Coupled with this quality in him was another which acted as its fitting helpmeet. He not only acquired wealth as a natural function, he retained it. Giving in his case was physically painful, and refusal of favors cost him no great effort. It is doubtful whether he enjoyed the sensation of wealth or merely followed an instinct in its piling up, which was as natural and no more enjoyable than breathing.

His life may be told in a few words. He was always lucky. Whenever there was some material benefit to be dispensed, circumstances placed him directly in the way of it. He had risen from employee to employer; he had outgrown his original business until now, at

nearly sixty, he was interested in many enterprises in which he had had no hand in the upbuilding, but which had sought either his means or the prestige of success which had become attached to his name. It was the latter, as well as a substantial investment in the stock of the corporation, which had procured him the election to the presidency of the Prescott Company on the death of its founder, William H. Prescott. Hughes had been one of the directors for several years.

Whatever the answer to the query as to his enjoyment of his wealth, there was no possible doubt as to his great joy in one of his few interests outside of money-getting. He was ardent as a church-goer. A member of St. Luke's Episcopal Church, one of the most fashionable in the city, he devoted much time to its affairs and never willingly missed attending the services. At present he was serving the government in Washington on one of the committees of prominent business men who had been called to lend expert service in the commercial aspect of war work, and yet he made the trip from Washington every Saturday evening to his own city, a matter of several hours, in order that he might spend Sunday according to the custom of years.

To St. Luke's, on the Sunday following Marian's walk with her father, Mrs. Hardwick, accompanied by Alice, came with the express purpose of seeing her uncle. She was not regular in her attendance, but went from time to time, as the mood seized her. Hardwick,

therefore, attached no importance to her going on this particular Sunday.

He was wrong. Mrs. Hardwick had determined to speak to her uncle about what she considered the interference of Pemberton with Hughes' plans. The latter had not promised her that Hardwick would receive any definite salary, he had merely remarked that McNair had received five thousand dollars. But to Mrs. Hardwick this was a promise, nay, a contract, to pay her husband the same figure.

Directly the services were over, she put herself in her uncle's way. He had not seen her in the church, and was really somewhat surprised to find her awaiting him at the entrance. She greeted him effusively:

"How well you are looking, dear Uncle," she said with her usual cackle, intended this time to indicate her joy in his appearance of health. "Washington and hard work evidently agree with you."

"I'm feeling all right," he answered. "Hard work agrees with everyone. How are you, Marian?" he asked, addressing Alice, whom he noticed for the first time.

"Very well, uncle," she answered. "Only I'm not Marian, I'm Alice." A little simpering giggle accompanied this, with the intention of putting him at ease after his blunder.

"To be sure," he said, "to be sure. I really know better. Surely you are Alice. How are Marian and Harry?" he asked, turning to his niece.

"Both are very well," she replied, "and how is dear Aunt Agnes?"

"Poorly. She seems to make no progress at all. The least effort tires her. Dr. Hayward is doing everything he can and we are hopeful for the best, but it's a slow business." He shook his head gravely.

"Alice and I will walk along with you to see her, if you think she will be able to receive us."

Hughes did not know how to avoid this visit, although he did not want it. He was not fond of his niece. She distinctly repelled him, he was always uncomfortable in her presence.

After a few words with some of the congregation, they started. Mrs. Hardwick did most of the talking, devoting herself to subjects which she felt would interest her uncle, and assuming the attitude in each case that she believed would win his approval. When they were half through their journey, she felt the ground had been sufficiently prepared and ventured into the subject which lay nearest her heart at the moment.

"Uncle James," she said with even greater unction than usual, "I want to talk to you about dear Henry. You know his great fault has always been that he does not push himself sufficiently. He has missed innumerable opportunities of self-betterment merely through an ingrained diffidence. You know this very well, for I have frequently spoken of it to you."

She paused, awaiting some sign of approval or inter-

est. But none came. Hughes was wearing a mask of stolidity which came upon him naturally whenever he sensed the approach of a request of any kind. Many a suppliant had lost courage in preferring a claim for his services merely upon sight of this expression of impenetrability. But Mrs. Hardwick knew it well, and knew further that, behind it, lay only the final impregnable rampart which defended the treasure chest. In the interval, once the primary defense was overthrown, she knew that patience on her part would be rewarded. So she went on:

"It was most lovely and thoughtful of you, dear Uncle James, to give Henry his position with your Company. None of us, I am sure, can ever be sufficiently grateful to you. However, it was what might have been expected of you by anyone who knew your goodness, and I surely am one."

Hughes listened. From anyone else, he might have enjoyed this obvious flattery. From her, it annoyed him, but he was powerless; he was compelled to listen. Mrs. Hardwick paid no further attention to the manner of his reception of her words and went on towards her objective. Hughes had an idea that he might be able to postpone the discussion of the matter by a reference to the impropriety of considering it on Sunday, but he felt that his niece knew him too well for this. His enjoyment of church had never been allowed to interfere with business on any day of the week.

"You know," she continued, "Henry went to see a Mr. Pemberton and arranged the details of his going with the Company with him. He's the general manager, I believe. You can imagine my surprise, my utter amazement, when Henry came home to me and announced that he had been compelled by this Pemberton to accept the position at the niggardly salary of thirty-five hundred dollars in spite of the fact that you had promised me that he would receive five thousand—"

"I made no promise," interrupted Hughes, "I said only—"

Mrs. Hardwick completely disregarded this interruption except for a very slight raising of her voice as she went on.

"Your well-known sense of justice is not likely to permit you to put up with such disregard of your instructions. I know that your generosity leads you to believe others to be actuated by the same motive, but, in this case, unfortunately, it is not true. You told me that Mr. McNair received a salary of five thousand dollars and that you would recommend Henry for the position. Coming from your lips, this was tantamount to the most carefully drawn contract. I knew at once that you intended that Henry should receive at least five thousand dollars and rejoiced accordingly.

"But, what do Henry's diffidence and Mr. Pemberton's illiberality do to your generous plans but completely upset them. Directly Henry announced the

issue of his conversation with this Pemberton, I determined to speak of the matter to you, feeling that it was due you to give you the opportunity to right a wrong which had been committed by one of your subordinates in defiance of your instructions. But poor, self-effacing Henry did not wish me to trouble you, little recognizing the rugged sense of justice which is your strongest characteristic. In order to pacify him, I did not reiterate my intention to lay the matter before you, and it therefore dropped from his mind and it is without his knowledge that I am upon this errand this morning."

Hughes was becoming uncomfortable. From previous experience with his niece, he knew there was no silencing her except by an agreement to do as she wished. A refusal would but prolong the exordium. She would seize upon some word or other and make it the basis for a new attack.

By this time they had reached his house and had seated themselves on the porch. There was no longer any importance attaching to the visit to his wife. Although they kept up the appearance of avuncular and niecely affection, the mask was actually off. It was a clear case of endurance, and, while Hughes maintained the seeming of resistance, he knew that he was beaten.

"I know how you feel towards us," she continued, "you have never missed an opportunity to do us a kindness or to be of service to us, and so I ask that you

rectify this mistake with full confidence that you will hasten to do so."

Hughes raised his hand in a deprecating gesture, but Mrs. Hardwick went right on. She had been through this sort of experience with him before and knew that her attack must not cease until there was no longer any spirit of protest left in him.

"Of course, I recognize that you must feel a certain delicacy with regard to interfering with the work of your subordinates, and it is but a mark of your fineness of feeling. If it were not a case in which a manifest injustice was being done, irrespective of the fact that the sufferers thereby are your own flesh and blood, it might be very well to hold your hand. But, in this instance, I know that all that is needed is to inform you of the fact; your sense of justice will do the rest."

"See here! Florrie," interrupted Hughes, rather weakly, it is true, "I didn't promise Harry any particular salary. I only—"

"Yes, I know," calmly interrupted his niece, "you did not make a definite promise. You did not say 'Henry, I engage you as our advertising manager at five thousand dollars a year.' That was not necessary. You did not say in express terms that you engaged him at any definite salary. You were held back from so crude a statement, I am sure, by considerations of delicacy which do you great credit. You merely told us that you would recommend him for the position which paid its previous

incumbent five thousand dollars. Your intention was obvious, there was no occasion to go into further details with us. We knew you, we were well aware that a hint from you was stronger than a bond from anyone else. Secure in the hope—”

“Say, Florrie,” he said, “one minute. Just what do you want me to do?”

She saw she had won and it was with difficulty that she restrained her joy. Until she had his definite promise, however, she must maintain her attitude of attack. In the same manner as before, therefore, she went on:

“I want you to do only what your sense of fairness will show is the proper step. It is not for me to suggest what means you are to employ to exercise your authority over your subordinates. You will, of course, tell him that you had given Henry to understand that he was to have the position at five thousand dollars and that, in view of the circumstances, your promise must be carried out. I am quite sure that you will—”

“All right,” said Hughes with resignation, “I’ll speak to Pemberton about it this afternoon, but I can’t promise that it will have any—”

Mrs. Hardwick broke in here. She did not want that sentence finished by him; she finished it.

“Of course not, dear Uncle. Of course you cannot promise that it will please him to have his decision, wrongful as it is, set aside. But, it appears to me, that is not necessary. Now that I have your definite promise

to have Henry's salary made what you gave us to understand it would be in the beginning, now that the five thousand dollars is actually to be paid, I cannot see that it would be other than captious on my part to ask anything further. Thank you ever so much, dear Uncle James, and now that our little understanding is quite complete, let us go to Aunt Agnes."

Twenty minutes later, as he heard the door close behind her and Alice, he turned to his wife with the remark, "I'm sorry for Harry Hardwick. That woman's a tartar even if she is my sister's child."

CHAPTER VIII

FLUSHED with victory, Mrs. Hardwick, accompanied by Alice, wended her way to the trolley which was to take them home. She was so much pleased with herself that her usual air of benevolence was immensely magnified. Actually she radiated good will. Any slight qualm of conscience which might have possessed her by reason of her action contrary to the expressed wish of her husband was speedily lost in the contemplation of the magnificence of her conquest. "Poor Henry," she thought, "it's lucky that he has a wife with a mind of her own; one who is not easily set aside; one who vindicates the claim of her sex for intellectual equality." But self-approbation, sweet though it might be, was insufficient. She craved the applause of the silent witness of her prowess, who now walked beside her without uttering a word.

"Alice, my dear," said her mother, "we have done a good morning's work."

"Yes, Mother," she answered, "father ought to be very happy."

This was not exactly what Mrs. Hardwick had expected, but it gave her an idea.

"Yes, my dear," she said, "undoubtedly. I want to caution you, however, not to mention to your father, or, in his hearing, to anyone else, that I approached

Uncle James on the subject of your father's compensation. I would much rather that he receive his increase of salary as a surprise, a delightful surprise."

"Yes, Mother," said the dutiful daughter.

"Your Uncle James," continued Mrs. Hardwick, "is a man who is quite set in his ideas. He is very difficult to move from an established position. I rather flatter myself upon having displayed some little adroitness in my talk with him." She paused. Alice took the cue.

"You were simply wonderful, Mother. I don't see how you were ever able to stick to it the way you did."

This was better and Mrs. Hardwick expanded still further. With her cackling laugh, now jubilant in tone, she proceeded:

"When there is work to be done, I do not falter; I am not easily set aside. Persistence in the face of obstacles is the great thing. When I know I am right, nothing can deter me, I go directly to my goal, fortified by the certainty of eventual success." She beamed upon her daughter, who attempted to appear much more impressed than she really was. She had seen much of her mother's method of persuasion, and, inwardly, had no high regard for it. Besides, the means to obtain her mother's object had no great concern for her, even though she could not fail to be interested in the result, since, in her mind, her going to college depended on it.

In the car there was no opportunity for further conversation, and, during the succeeding short walk to their house, they spoke of other matters.

The visit to Uncle James' house had made them nearly an hour late for their dinner, the quality of which had suffered considerably from the delay. None of the family made any comment, either upon Mrs. Hardwick's lack of punctuality or its result upon their food. They were used to both.

Hardwick asked about their morning and was informed as to the sermon, of which his wife had not approved, and also of their meeting with Uncle James, the latter, of course, without any mention of her having waylaid him.

"Uncle James told me how poorly Aunt Agnes is," said Mrs. Hardwick, "and I could not resist his mute invitation that we come to see her. I spent only a few minutes with her, but I believe that she was much brighter when we left. It is surely a pity that so fine a woman should suffer such misery as she is undergoing."

And so on at great length.

After dinner, Hardwick went to his room for his customary Sunday afternoon nap, while his wife resumed her writing in the sewing-room.

The two girls went out on the porch. It was a delicious June afternoon, just warm enough to make sitting out of doors delightful. The spring foliage, tenderly green, was eloquent of youth. The sky was almost cloudless.

Marian threw herself into a swinging seat at one end of the porch while Alice sat demurely in a rocking chair. For several minutes neither of them spoke, each busy

with her own thoughts. The silence was broken by Marian.

"Did you see 'him in church?" she asked with an emphasis on the word "him."

"Whom do you mean?" asked Alice with a show of innocence.

"You know all right. Was *he* there?"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Oh! No!" said Marian, derisively. "*You* don't know."

"No; I don't."

"Do you want me to tell you?"

"I don't care whether you do or not, silly," answered Alice.

"Well, if you don't care, neither do I."

"I saw Uncle James."

"I don't mean him. Mother told us all about him."

"Oh! Did she?"

"Didn't she?"

"You're so smart that I suppose you know all about it without being told."

"All about what?" asked Marian, now really curious.

"It's a secret anyway, so I won't tell you."

"A secret," cried Marian, wildly curious.

"Yes; a secret."

"Tell me."

"No, I daren't say anything about it. Mother told me not to."

"Please tell me," pleaded Marian, "I won't breathe it."

"Nothing doing," answered Alice, decisively.

"Oh! please tell me, Allie, I won't mention it to anybody. Honest, I won't."

"I guess you won't if I don't tell you. So there."

"If you don't tell me, I'll tell mother where you went the day you said you were going over to Frothinghams'."

"You promised me you wouldn't," cried Alice.

"I don't care. If you don't tell me the secret, I'll tell mother."

"Tell-tale," taunted Alice.

"I don't care. I'm going to tell unless I hear the secret."

"Will you swear never to breathe it to a living soul?" asked Alice.

"Honest."

"All right. Then I'll tell you. But if you ever let out one word, I'll never tell you another thing."

"I promise."

"Mother talked Uncle James into raising father's salary to five thousand dollars."

"But father asked her not to."

"I know, but she did it just the same. You ought to have heard the line of talk she handed the old boy. He didn't get a chance to get a word in edgewise."

Marian was silent. She felt that this was treachery. With her Hardwick's slightest wish was law and the knowledge of her mother's action caused her a sense of great injury.

Her silence alarmed Alice, who felt what was in her mind.

"Remember," she said, "you promised not to tell."

"I know," answered Marian and said no more. Alice picked up a newspaper which was lying on the porch floor and began to look through it, while Marian went into the house.

Just before the evening meal, Marian came out on the porch and sat down near her father, who had been there alone. Hardwick was in a most jovial humor and showed it plainly in bantering her. Usually she responded gaily to such talk, but this evening she was preoccupied and gave him only monosyllabic answers. Presently he noticed her quiet humor and asked her what was in her thoughts.

"I'm trying to make up my mind about something," she said.

"Can I help you?" he asked solicitously.

"I don't know," she answered.

A short silence ensued, broken by Marian.

"I know something that I'd like to tell you, but I promised I wouldn't tell and I do so want to that I don't know what to do about it."

Hardwick was curious but could not determine what course to pursue. He knew that if he pressed her, she would tell him, promise or no promise, and, while he wanted to know what she was withholding from him, he did not wish to take the position of asking her to break a promise.

He chose silence as the wisest course and sat looking at her attentively.

"Oh, dear!" she sighed.

"Is it an important thing?" he asked finally.

"Awfully important." She relapsed into silence, wishing that he would resolve her doubt by asking what it was. He said nothing, however, and presently she could contain herself no longer.

"I just have to tell you, pops, dear, but you mustn't let mother or Allie know you know anything about it. Will you?"

"Certainly not," he answered.

"Well, mother went to church this morning to see Uncle James and she talked his ear off and he promised to raise your salary to five thousand dollars."

She blurted this out all in one breath. Hardwick was dismayed. Leaning towards her, he asked:

"How do you know this?"

"Allie told me and I promised not to tell. You won't let on, will you?"

"No; I won't say a word."

He got up from his chair and walked to and fro on the porch. He wanted to think straight, to determine what he would do, but he could not. He was thoroughly angry, an anger which was mixed with a keen sense of injury. Thus far, his relations with Pemberton had been all that he could have wished. He felt that Pemberton had been pleased with his work and that it would be but a short

time before its quality would be recognized in a practical way. Pemberton had enjoined him not to use his wife's relationship with Hughes to procure an advance in his salary and he had agreed. And now, in spite of his clearly expressed wish, Mrs. Hardwick had done this very thing. He wanted to charge her with it, to tell her that instead of helping him she had almost surely made it impossible for him to hold his position. He felt sure that Pemberton would simply dismiss him. He knew that Hughes was no more than a figurehead in the Prescott Company and that Pemberton's will was law.

He did not want to lose this position, entirely apart from the consideration that it might be difficult to find another. He felt that this was the one great opportunity of his career, in which he was offered the chance of real success by the exercise of talents which he knew he possessed and also the means to apply them.

Finally, he made up his mind that he must talk to Uncle James and tell him not to pay any attention to Mrs. Hardwick's request, that he would prefer to make his own way in the concern and that he did not doubt that it would take but a short time for him to show Pemberton that he was worth at least as much as McNair. He felt somewhat more comfortable when he reached this decision, but not altogether so. He still turned the matter over and over in his mind, wondering if there were not a better course for him to pursue.

As he was walking to and fro, Alice called them to

the table. He sat through the meal, almost entirely silent. His taciturnity was observed only by Marian, who did not wonder at it. Alice's thoughts were elsewhere and Mrs. Hardwick was far too busy, expatiating at great length on a number of subjects interesting to herself alone, to notice any change in his manner.

Directly the meal was over, he announced that he was going to take a short walk. As the diminutive and incompetent maid was taking her Sunday out, the three women of the family had the clearing up to attend to and none of them offered to accompany him.

He walked to the nearest drug store and entered the telephone booth. It was a matter of a moment to get the Hughes house on the wire, and, when he did so, he was utterly amazed to learn that Mr. Hughes had just left for Washington.

His first sensation was one of great relief. Uncle James' departure had at least delayed the matter. He would now have time to think it over carefully. If it were actually necessary, he could forestall the effect of his wife's meddling by telling Pemberton of it before he could hear from Hughes, and by disclaiming the desire to make any alteration in their existing arrangements based upon any consideration other than the value of his services to the Company.

He was buoyantly cheerful when he rejoined the family. No one except Marian noticed the change in his demeanor. She wondered what had brought it about and

was burning to ask him about it. However, she did not do so, restrained by a sense of delicacy. Presently, however, she fell under the spell of his good humor, and, childlike, forgot all about it.

At four o'clock in the morning Hardwick awoke. As he lay in bed, trying all of the well-known expedients for the wooing of reluctant sleep, it suddenly came to him that it was well within the possibilities that Uncle James may have communicated with Pemberton during the afternoon. This bare possibility became a dreadful reality to him and his misery of the day before returned to him more acutely than ever. During the hours that immediately precede arising, the human system is at its lowest ebb, and any untoward circumstance is magnified inordinately. Perhaps it is partly due to the impossibility of action. We are chained to our beds by the custom of years and we suffer the pains of the prisoner.

After a period of dull contemplation of this, to him, dire possibility, Hardwick succeeded in bringing his reason to bear on the subject. Finally, he decided that he would go to Pemberton as soon as the latter would receive him and lay the whole story before him. He felt quite sure that Pemberton would take his word for his entire ignorance of Mrs. Hardwick's intention.

This decision reached, he was again more comfortable and shortly thereafter fell into a sound slumber.

CHAPTER IX

PUNCTUALITY was one of Ruth Bernstein's qualities. Half-past eight found her at her desk every morning, ready for business. Hers was a disposition which demanded that she fail in no particular so obvious as this. At first a matter of pure self-consciousness, it speedily became an ingrained habit, and in this she was like the canary which, when liberated, sought the cage to which it was accustomed. If her punctuality had ever caused her any sense of compulsion to an imposed discipline, it was now a perfectly normal function closed to all question.

She was usually the first to arrive at the office. The other employees drifted in between half-past eight and quarter of nine and it was usually nine o'clock before the entire force was at work. The principals came at nine or later, Pemberton usually reached his desk at nine-fifteen.

On the Monday morning following the events last recounted, Ruth was much surprised, on arriving at her desk, to find a note addressed to her in Pemberton's hand asking her to come to his office immediately. She was utterly unable to account for his early coming, although, in the few minutes which elapsed before she entered his office, she thought of a number of reasons which might have been responsible, all of which, however, she rejected as being highly improbable.

She was conscious, immediately upon opening the door of his office, that he had been awaiting her arrival anxiously. He was not seated at his desk, but stood by the window. She felt that he was angry, and his manner, as he almost curtly bade her close the door, confirmed it.

"Sit down," he said, as he came towards his desk. There was no other greeting.

Ruth sat down in silence, waiting for him to speak.

"Listen, Ruth," he said, and she started at his use of her given name, but she made no protest. "Yesterday afternoon," he went on, "Hughes sent for me and practically ordered me to raise Hardwick's pay to five thousand dollars." He looked at her searchingly as he uttered these words, as though he would read the impression they made upon her in her face. But she showed only a cold interest.

"I told Hardwick," he continued, "when I engaged him, that he was not to use his wife's relationship to have his salary increased, and he agreed to it." He spoke quickly, with much warmth. Ruth still maintained her air of detached interest but said nothing. Pemberton, who had been standing by his chair, now sat down in it, but immediately got up again and resumed his former position. He was clearly nervous, she thought, and wondered why. There was nothing difficult about the situation, as she saw it; the whole issue lay in Pemberton's hands.

"I'll have to get rid of him," he resumed, "I'm not

going to have this business run on any such basis. Hardwick's a pretty good man, much better than the average; better even than I thought he was. But I won't stand for this." He began to walk to and fro, his perturbation mounting visibly.

"Why do you tell me this?" she asked at length.

"Because I want you to take his position," he answered, stopping in front of his desk and looking at her fixedly.

"We went over that before," she answered calmly, "and my answer is the same now as it was then. Besides, I want to call your attention to the fact that we agreed that you were not to call me 'Ruth,' certainly not in the office."

"Oh! What's the use of all this?" he asked angrily. "Why do you continually hold me at arm's length? What's the matter with me?"

"Nothing," she said in answer to the last of his questions, "but you know that you agreed as the price of my remaining here that you would not press me to change my decision for one year. And that's not two months ago." She spoke with great earnestness but with perfect control of herself.

"I don't know what to make of you," he went on. "You seem to be in perfect sympathy with all of my ideas, you are willing to have me as a friend, you're even satisfied to consider me as much more than that, and yet you insist upon a whole year to make up your

mind." He began anew to walk to and fro, his anger dominating him.

"Listen, Mr. Pemberton," she began.

"Don't call me 'Mr. Pemberton' when we are alone," he cried. "If you can't call me 'Fred,' don't use any name at all."

She rose, saying: "There's nothing to be gained by my staying here while you're in your present mood," and started for the door.

"Sit down," he almost shouted, "I want to talk to you."

She came back to her chair but did not seat herself. She looked at him questioningly, but he did not speak to her. After a pause, she said quietly:

"What do you wish to say to me?"

"Just this: I want you to help me out of this difficulty." His tone was quiet, persuasive.

"How?" she inquired.

"I want you to take Hardwick's place."

"Are you really going to discharge him?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because he broke his promise to me. I'm either going to run this business or I'm not going to run it." His voice was again in his usual matter-of-fact business tone.

"What did Mr. Hughes say to you?"

"He told me that Mrs. Hardwick had come to him and had insisted that he had promised her that Hard-

wick would receive the same salary that McNair got. He denied having made this promise, but said that he might have given her that impression. At any rate, he said that he had told her yesterday morning that he would speak to me about it and that he would very much like me to do it."

"And you offered your resignation," she interrupted, coolly.

"How did you know?" he asked, surprised.

"I know you," she answered.

"Well, I did offer to resign but he wouldn't hear of it. He told me the matter was entirely in my hands and that I should do whatever I thought best."

"And you think it best to discharge him," she said, scornfully.

"How else could I maintain discipline?"

"Oh! Discipline," she said, still scornfully.

"Well, discipline or not, that's what I'm going to do."

"Mr. Hardwick's a good man in the position, isn't he?" she inquired.

"I told you that a few minutes ago. That's what makes me mad."

"And you're going to get rid of him because he wants to be paid a fair salary?" she asked.

"I don't mind the amount of the salary. I only object to the means he used."

"If you don't object to the salary, why didn't you give it to him in the first place?" Ruth asked all of these

questions in the quietest manner. She still stood by the chair, one hand resting on the back of it. She looked directly at him and her steady gaze was visibly making him uncomfortable.

"Because I wanted him to have an incentive to work, to show what was in him," he answered.

"That's what you tell yourself and what you make yourself believe, but Mr.—" She paused, remembering his injunction not to address him formally. "The real truth is that you wanted to master him, you wished to bend him to your will, you wanted to domineer, to bully— Oh, I know I'm right," she went on, as he made a gesture of impatience, "you can't help yourself. You're the master and you want everyone to know it, and what's more, to feel it. You'd bully me if you could."

"No, I wouldn't. You're not fair. You—"

"I am fair," she interrupted, "but you're not. Are you really going to let him go?"

"Yes."

"Well, if you do, I won't stay here. You can fill two places instead of one." There was no mistaking her sincerity. Pemberton knew that she meant every word.

"Why are you so much interested in him?" he asked.

"I'm not interested in him. I'm interested in you, I'm interested in fairness. I want you to use your power, Lord knows you have it, with justice. Please don't do this thing—" she pleaded.

"Are you asking me not to do it for your sake?" he asked quickly.

"No; for your own."

"I'd do anything for you, Ruth," he said with intense earnestness. "Even this, which goes against all of my ideas. If you'd ask me to keep Hardwick and double his salary just to please you, I'd do it in a minute."

"You don't understand," she said anxiously. "It isn't for me, it isn't for Mr. Hardwick, it's for you. Don't you see, Fred?" she was so intent upon conveying her meaning to him that she used his Christian name unconsciously. But he was fully conscious of it, and it thrilled him.

"Don't you see," she went on, "that I have a standard for you that I want you to live up to? You mustn't always drive, you needn't always force others to do your bidding, simply because you have been given the power. Here's this man, for instance, whom you compelled to take his position at a salary far below what you knew it was worth just because you *could* do it. It's beneath you, it's beneath my ideal of what a strong man should do."

Pemberton listened to her intently. He felt, rather than perceived, the beauty of her voice, he was uplifted by her earnestness.

"I don't say Mr. Hardwick was right," she continued, "to send his wife to Mr. Hughes after he promised not to do so. But, after all, what do you know about what lay behind it? What do you know of their circumstances that should make you so ready to judge? You won't do this thing, will you?"

Pemberton looked at her for a moment and then walked over to her and held out his right hand. She took it in her own, still looking at him fixedly.

"You won't do it?" she asked again.

"No," he said, and was strangely happy in his submission.

"All right," she answered brightly, withdrawing her hand from his. "That's fine. You've made me very happy." The radiant look she gave him filled him with joy as he watched her leave the room.

When she had gone, he stood for a moment, a prey to conflicting emotions. But it was only for a moment and then his customary manner was again upon him. He seated himself at his desk, picked up his telephone and said:

"Send Mr. Hardwick to me."

A moment later he was informed that Mr. Hardwick had not yet reached the office. Pemberton looked at his watch and saw that it was not yet nine o'clock. He thought for a moment and then telephoned that he no longer desired to see Mr. Hardwick.

His mail was then brought to him, not more than a half dozen letters. He initialed all but one which he laid away in one of the drawers in his desk. Calling a boy, he directed him to distribute those which he had initialed.

This was the work of but a few minutes, and no sooner was it finished than the head of the sales department asked for and obtained an interview which engaged both of them for the next two hours.

CHAPTER X

HARDWICK was somewhat late in coming to the office on this Monday morning. He was quite variable in this respect, although he devoutly believed himself to be the soul of punctuality. His plans always took a careful account of the time he proposed to use for any enterprise. The plan once made, any interruption or delay was considered unavoidable and of no effect upon the validity of his original intention because it could not have been foreseen. Hardwick was what may be called an optimist, his experience was of little service in his calculations of the future. If ninety-nine of his projects failed to mature exactly as he expected, that was no reason for him not to anticipate perfect fruition for the hundredth.

As he hurriedly walked from the car to the office this morning, he was turning over in his mind various methods of explaining to Pemberton his wife's unauthorized petition to Hughes. It had seemed quite simple to him before, but now, when it was actually to be done, it developed extraordinary difficulty. It would not be easy to admit that his word went for so little in his own household. Such an admission would hurt his pride in many ways. It was quite conceivable that it would open the door to questions which, even if they were not actually put into words, would cause him great embarrassment.

Of course, he could so arrange the facts which he had to tell that it might be made to appear that the meeting between Mrs. Hardwick and her uncle had been quite accidental and that the subject of his salary had been discussed as a result of some remark of Hughes which had led her to comment on the difference between his salary and that paid McNair. No, that wouldn't do. It was too thin. It may be observed that Hardwick would not have scrupled to lie about the matter if he could have hit upon a dependable perversion or rearrangement of the truth. But he had conscientious scruples against being caught in a lie. He valued the opinion of others far too much to be able to rest content under the imputation of untruthfulness.

He was still uncertain as he entered the office and his doubt troubled him. As he was opening his desk, the thought came to him that he was foolish to try to decide in advance what to say. He would go to Pemberton just as soon as he had gone through his mail. When he was in his presence, the right words would come. He hated the whole business. If only his wife had not meddled.

As he went through the letters which were awaiting him, he found that he was not really grasping their contents. There was a clamor in his mind which, when he arrested the attention he was forcing on his correspondence, was a dull repetition of the question: What should he say to Pemberton? He found himself growing nervous; an irritation seized him which he could not throw off.

At last the letters had been looked at, one by one, although he scarcely knew what they contained, and then, feeling that he must rid himself of the incubus which weighted him, he asked the operator to inquire whether Mr. Pemberton could see him. Word came promptly that Mr. Pemberton was engaged and could not be disturbed for at least one hour. The news was an instant balm to his spirits. A delay was just what he felt he needed and, with great relief, he again went over his letters, this time with sharp attention.

When he had mastered their contents, he called for Miss Henderon and set promptly to work dictating. The first few letters were easy to answer and there was no pause between them. At last he came to one which required some consideration, and, as he sat in thought, Miss Henderson saw an opportunity for conversation and embraced it. Hardwick answered her, at first with little interest, but soon yielded to his own love of small talk and momentarily forgot his business. Their talk lasted only a few minutes and ceased when he again picked up the letter he was engaged in answering. Obedient to his gesture, Miss Henderson poised her pencil, her attitude one of complete attention, when an idea came to her.

"Have you seen Mr. Pemberton yet?" she asked.

Hardwick was completely unnerved by this simple question. In view of the emotion which had so recently controlled him, he was entirely taken aback by her

query. What did it mean? What did she know? Was it possible that Hughes could have communicated with Pemberton after all? He had a choking feeling as he answered:

“No; why do you ask?”

Miss Henderson was busily regarding the finger nails of her right hand and did not notice the intense interest in his voice which he tried to conceal. She answered:

“Just as I was coming into the office I heard the operator say that Mr. Pemberton wanted to see you. I don’t think you were here yet.”

“Oh!” said Hardwick. He felt that he must think. He could not go on with his dictation and, laying down the letter, dismissed her.

What could it mean other than Pemberton’s knowledge of Mrs. Hardwick’s action? He made no doubt of what would happen. As soon as Pemberton was ready, he would send for him and discharge him. An infinite misery seized him in which, panic stricken, he saw himself without a position, crushed by an overwhelming mass of debt, discredited, helpless, his family in want. He sat at his desk blankly, unconscious of his surroundings, incapable of thought.

But the mood was too extreme to last, and as it began to dissipate he heard Ruth Bernstein ask him a question. He looked up and, begging her pardon, asked her to repeat it, explaining that he had been so intent upon a certain matter that he had not been conscious of her presence.

She repeated her question, and as she did so he forced himself, by a great effort, to take in what she said, although a large part of his attention was still claimed by the thoughts which had completely dominated him but a moment before.

As they talked, he gradually regained mastery of his mind and, before they were half through, he was ready to laugh at his recent abject fear. If he must lose this position, he'd get another. After all, his life did not depend entirely upon the favor of the business manager of the Prescott Company.

When they had disposed of the matter which she had brought to him, he asked her:

"Was Mr. Pemberton inquiring for me?"

"Yes," she answered, "but afterwards he said that he had changed his mind. That was before you came in."

"You don't know what he wanted?" he asked.

She took refuge in a lie.

"No," she said slowly.

There was just a shade of doubt in her tone, the least bit imaginable; enough, however, to make him look at her questioningly. But her face was inscrutable; she met his gaze directly and he read a challenge in her eyes which he could not meet, and turned away. She took this as a dismissal and left him.

He picked up some papers from his desk and examined them, without the ability, however, to fix his mind on them. He knew that he would be unable to work until

this matter was off his mind. So, putting on his hat, he told Ruth that he was going over to the printer to give some instructions, and left the office.

In the street he felt better, and, as he walked along rapidly, he found himself taking a clearer view of the whole business. After all, nothing had happened with which he could reproach himself. That much was clear and his conscience was easy. As soon as he could see Pemberton, he would tell him the whole story straightforwardly. He would make no attempt to deceive him in any way. If Pemberton chose to disbelieve him, if he demanded his resignation, there was nothing to do but find another position. It would be hard, particularly in view of the questions the brevity of his connection with the Prescott Company would bring, but that was just his bad luck. And then anger at his wife seized him. What had she ever done to help him? She was extravagant, shiftless, lazy. Yes, lazy. Other men similarly situated got along well. They seemed to spend more money than he and they never got into debt. It must be because their wives were really economical, while Florrie, meaning well, no doubt, simply frittered away the money he gave her, with the result that they were always in arrears and had nothing to show for what they spent. He determined to speak to her again, and this time he would not allow her to sidetrack him by irrelevant answers. But even as he made this resolution he had a vision of their many previous talks on this subject, which had invariably ended in his utter defeat.

And then he came back to his impending interview with Pemberton. He began to phrase his opening remarks and soon found himself composing a fine, moving statement, eloquent in its complete simplicity. By this time he was thoroughly master of himself and walked quickly back to the office. As he entered, he asked the telephone operator to see if Mr. Pemberton could give him a few minutes. He had no sooner reached his desk than he was told that he might come in at once.

Pemberton was sitting at his desk as usual with the appearance of having nothing to do. He greeted Hardwick coolly and asked him to sit down. Hardwick did so and was just about to begin his story when Pemberton said:

"Mr. Hardwick, I've decided to advance your salary to the amount we paid McNair. It will date from the first of the month."

Hardwick was so amazed that he could only stammer a word of thanks. Through his mind ran the question: What could have happened to bring such a thing about? Was it possible that the quality of his work was really appreciated? And with these questions came the certainty that Uncle James could not have communicated with Pemberton.

The latter paid no attention whatever to Hardwick's thanks and went on unconcernedly:

"I don't want you to think that this has been brought about in any way by the use of your wife's relationship

to Mr. Hughes and your appeal to him to advance you, in the face of my request and your promise that you would not bring this relation to bear on your connection with the company. I resent this action on your part, and, at first, I was inclined to ask for your resignation. But I have determined to give you another chance, and, at the same time, to remove the temptation from you—”

Hardwick broke in here. “Mr. Pemberton,” he said, in great confusion, “let me explain—”

“Wait until I have finished,” interrupted the other. “Your work so far has been excellent. I have no doubt that you have the ability to earn the higher salary and, perhaps, even more. At the same time, I am not accustomed to having my orders disobeyed and I wish to give you formal notice that the next time I won’t be so lenient.”

“Mr. Pemberton,” said Hardwick, “I don’t want this increase unless you think I’m worth it. Of course I’ll be glad to have it. I need it. But I need your confidence still more. I know I can make good in this job and even if I don’t get the five thousand now, it won’t take me long to convince you that I’m actually worth it by producing the goods.”

“That’s all right,” answered Pemberton. “That matter’s disposed of and we won’t go back to it. And if you’ll excuse me—” He got up from his chair, which was the signal that the interview was over.

But Hardwick would not go. He felt he must clear

himself of the charge of disobedience and unfaithfulness to his promise. He also arose from his chair but did not move away from it.

"One word before I go," he said hastily. "I did not know that Mrs. Hardwick was going to speak to Mr. Hughes about my salary. In fact, I particularly asked her not to do so the evening of the day we came to terms. It was done by her entirely without my knowledge and consent. When I learned of it in a round-about way, I determined to speak to you at the first opportunity to disclaim any responsibility and to ask you to pay no attention to the request."

"Very well, Mr. Hardwick," said Pemberton, in a tone which effectually closed the interview. "We'll say no more about it."

As the door closed upon Hardwick, Pemberton was convinced that his advertising manager was an accomplished liar. He almost regretted his promise to Ruth, but the thought of his joy in submitting to her came back to him and changed this emotion to satisfaction.

CHAPTER XI

HARDWICK came away from his interview with Pemberton with a sense of defeat. He felt that he had not convinced him of his complete innocence. The sharp closing of the interview by Pemberton made him feel baffled, incapable, like a cork in a strong current. But this feeling speedily left him in his delight over the practical result of the interview. Besides, Pemberton had actually praised him and had called him worthy of his increased salary.

He threw himself into his work that afternoon with even greater zeal than he had yet shown, and when the time came for him to go home, he felt that never in his life had he done better. This was his opportunity, his first real chance to demonstrate his ability. In the short meeting of department managers during the afternoon, he had taken a most active part and several of his suggestions had won general approval.

He came home in the gayest possible mood. He greeted all of the family effusively, making no mention of the cause of his happiness until they had nearly finished their dinner. Then he told them, laying particular emphasis on Pemberton's words of appreciation and making no reference at all to the interposition of Uncle James. Mrs. Hardwick was at a loss to account for this. She had taken it for granted that the increased

salary would not be offered immediately, and that when it came it would be accounted for entirely by the request or, as she took it, the order of her uncle. However, she did not venture any remark on the subject, but congratulated Hardwick upon his good fortune and promptly mentioned a number of things which she said they required and which she believed they were now in a position to obtain.

Hardwick offered no objection in the presence of the girls, principally because one of the prospective expenditures was Alice's college course. Besides, he had made up his mind, he believed definitely, that their whole living expense must be put on a rational basis, one that would permit them gradually to emerge from the load of debt that hung over them. He wished to discuss these matters privately with his wife and, therefore, waited until they had gone to their room for the night.

In the meantime, as an outlet for his gay spirits, he proposed that the family celebrate by going somewhere for the evening. The girls promptly suggested moving pictures, to which objection was urged by their mother on the ground of the low intellectual plane of this form of entertainment. Finally, she yielded to the unanimous wish of the rest of the family, and they repaired to a theatre in the neighborhood, saw the whole program, and ended the evening in a blaze of glory by indulging in ice-cream sodas.

When they reached home, the girls went to bed in

high spirits and their parents retired into the privacy of their bedroom. Hardwick sat down at once, and his wife followed his example. She knew that he had something to say to her and waited for him to begin.

"Florrie," he said, "now that we have this additional income, we must devote ourselves to getting out of debt. I've been thinking over the matter all afternoon. I've figured up what we owe and how we'll be able to pay it. It'll take time, of course, but I think we'll be able to manage it inside of two years." He paused.

"How much do we owe?" she inquired.

He felt the coming storm and prepared himself to meet it.

"Two thousand, eight hundred and thirty odd dollars," he said slowly. "Do you want to know the details of it? I have a list here which I made up this afternoon."

Mrs. Hardwick waved this proposal to one side by a magnificent gesture which was supposed to convey an intimation of her contempt for sordid details.

"I should like to know," she said, her cackle in evidence, now intended to imply a patronizing pity for the feebleness of her husband's intellect, "I should like to know," she repeated, emphasizing each word, "how you are going to pay nearly three thousand dollars of debt in two years out of your income. That, unless I err in my figures, would reduce our total expenditure to the amount of your recent salary."

"Exactly," said Hardwick. He felt that irritation was

gaining a measure of control over him. He determined not to let it master him and added no explanation of his answer, sure that silence was safer than speech.

Mrs. Hardwick waited a moment for him to continue, but, as he did not do so, she spoke:

"Henry, I do not understand you at all. You are well aware of the fact that your salary of four thousand was not sufficient to meet our extremely moderate expenses. Everything is higher now, and yet you expect us to live on even less. How do you propose to accomplish this?" Her air was one of injury; it expressed a benevolent disappointment.

"We're going to figure out just what we can have for thirty-five hundred dollars, say three hundred a month, and that's all we're going to spend." He spoke coolly, with an appearance of settled determination which he was far from feeling.

"And I suppose," said his wife, with unveiled sarcasm, "that the determination of these expenditures will be in your hands. You will decide whether our dinner will consist of veal cutlet or fried flounder; you will make the selection of suitable, inexpensive vegetables; your approval will be necessary for the purchase of a bar of soap. Perhaps you may also choose the girls' wearing apparel. Of course, for mine, there will be no occasion for the exercise of your judgment, for there will be no accessions to my wardrobe under such circumstances."

"Don't be silly, Florrie," Hardwick put in at this point. "Please don't make a farce of this thing. You know very well that all I want to do is to determine in a general way how much we'll spend for each of the various items, and see to it that the total comes within the figure that we have to dispose of. And then, stick to it in practice."

"I wash my hands of the whole business," said his spouse, rising and beginning to unhook her dress with an air of finality. "If my management of our household fails to meet with your approval, if my careful economy at every turn appears to you to be extravagance, there is but one thing for me to do, and that is to ask to be relieved from the responsibility of disbursing the munificent sum which you place at my disposal."

Hardwick was thoroughly angry.

"You can cut out all of that nonsense, if you please," he said, not loudly but with an intensity and an apparent fixity of purpose which completely surprised Mrs. Hardwick. "There's no use in pretending that you're going to do something which you know very well you won't do. Now, let's get down to brass tacks, and see what we've got to do."

Mrs. Hardwick saw that he was in earnest and that it would be wise not to anger him. She had no doubt of her ability to make her point finally, but, for the present, it was inadvisable to push it. She sat down again.

"I wish you would not make use of those vulgar expressions, Henry," she said in a tone which was intended to convey her sincere desire to be of great service to him.

Hardwick paid no attention to her remark and went on with the subject of their expenditures.

"I want you to figure carefully just what we shall need for our table, for ordinary household supplies, for wages, coal, electric light, gas and so on. And then we must consider our clothing. That's the sensible thing to do, and then, when we know what our limit is, we must not, under any circumstances, exceed it. You agree, don't you?" he asked, anxiously, hoping that she would fall in with his views.

"The principle is absolutely correct. It is exactly what I have always done. Indeed, I have gone further. In many cases I have come well within the figures which I had set. I am quite sure, when we come to go over our expenditures in detail, that you will be surprised at my ability to do so much with so little."

"I don't doubt that you've done very well, Florrie, but you'll admit that there is always room for improvement in anything. We'll go over the figures tomorrow evening and make up our budget."

"Just as you say," she answered. The words were compliance but the tone was not. Hardwick's anger again flared up.

"There's another thing I want to talk to you about,"

he said sharply. "You went to Uncle James and asked him to have my pay increased after I had told you definitely that I had given my word that such a thing would not be done."

Mrs. Hardwick was unpleasantly surprised. She had thought that Pemberton would not care to disclose the fact that he had been forced to raise her husband's salary by the exercise of the authority of Uncle James. She had contemplated with delight the satisfaction that would be hers when the time came for her to tell dear Henry what she had done for him. And here he was upbraiding her, in a tone of anger, for an action which she had undertaken, as she saw it, solely in his interest.

"I suppose you thought," he went on bitterly, "that you were helping me; that I was such a poor specimen that, without your help and Uncle James', I'd be entirely incapable of making headway in this job. But do you know what you almost succeeded in accomplishing?" He paused and looked at her, but she did not answer.

"You nearly had me discharged. That's what your meddling brought about and no more. Pemberton told me that his first impulse was to ask for my resignation, but that he had been so well satisfied with my work that he determined to give me another chance."

"And you believed that?" she asked scornfully.

"Certainly. You don't know Pemberton. He's as hard as nails. And, besides, he's the whole show at the

Prescott Company. Uncle James has as much to say as you have. He's just a figurehead. But the real boss is Pemberton. They tell me down there that the whole board of directors just sit there and listen to him and O. K. every proposition he puts up to them. I can see Uncle James making him do anything he didn't want to do," he added derisively.

"Then why did he raise your salary just after Uncle James spoke to him about it?" she asked, really curious.

"As he put it," answered Hardwick, "it was to place me beyond even the temptation to solicit Uncle James' help."

"Well, I don't care what they say about Uncle James being a mere figurehead," replied Mrs. Hardwick, "nor how capable this man Pemberton may be, the fact stands out that you received your increase when Uncle James asked for it, and I feel that that is sufficient evidence." She uttered these words with infinite self-complacency, again feeling quite justified in regarding her action as purely benevolent.

"You don't seem to remember what a pitiful figure I cut in the whole proceeding," said Hardwick. "I give my word that I will not do a certain thing and then you go and do it. Either I'm a liar or my word goes for nothing in my own household." He was quiet now, no longer angry, but deeply hurt.

"When I have to choose between the starvation of my little ones," Mrs. Hardwick had resumed her gran-

diloquent manner, "and observing a promise unworthily extorted from one whose chief concern should be the welfare of these children (I say nothing of the welfare of their mother, she is quite accustomed to take second place), I do not hesitate. I am sorry you are so thin-skinned, so anxious to curry favor with persons like this man Pemberton, even at the sacrifice of your family, but, if you are, that is no reason why I should fail in my clear duty." She arose and proceeded with her disrobing, while he still remained in his chair moodily silent. Presently he also arose and, undressing rapidly, went to bed.

Mrs. Hardwick always took quite some time to complete her arrangements for the night, and was used to finding Hardwick asleep when she was finally ready. Tonight, however, he was lying in bed with wide-open eyes, with no sign of drowsiness upon him. Mrs. Hardwick's thoughts had been most pleasant while she was undressing; she enjoyed her final victory and was disposed to be magnanimous to her defeated opponent.

As soon as she was in bed, she said:

"I've been thinking about our obligations, my dear Henry, and it occurs to me that it would be a wise thing to borrow from your father a sufficient sum to discharge all of these debts. All that he has will eventually come to you and your sister, so that it will be a mere anticipation. Besides, you could pay him interest, so that he would be quite as well off."

"You forget that I already owe him nearly five thousand dollars without counting the interest."

"I had no idea it was so large a sum," answered Mrs. Hardwick, "but what is the difference? You are his only son and I am quite sure that he will be delighted to help you out of your difficulties."

"I'm ashamed to go to him again. He's by no means a rich man. Nearly everything he's got is invested in the farm and since mother's death he's been none too successful. I wouldn't have the face to ask him."

"That's you all over," said Mrs. Hardwick. "You'd let your children starve in the gutter rather than hurt your silly pride by asking for what is actually yours by right. I don't mean that you're to make a special errand of this business. When we spend our two weeks with father this summer, you can bring up the matter very easily. I'm sure you won't have to do more than mention it to bring him to offer the help you want."

"Perhaps so," answered Hardwick, and turned over in bed as a signal that he wished to go to sleep. Since the suggestion of his wife did not call for immediate action, there was no occasion to bother about it at present. Perhaps it would be as she said, the help might come without the necessity of making a direct request. It wasn't such a poor scheme after all.

CHAPTER XII

AT half past five o'clock, on an evening of early September, in this year, Mrs. Regina Bernstein, widow, of apparently indeterminate age, although surely more than thirty-five, came languidly into the living room of her flat and seated herself by the window. She was slender, and of somewhat less than average height. Her dark hair was arranged most demurely, combed back tightly over her temples; her features were quite regular; her cheeks were thin, and the general effect of her face was that it was narrow. Perhaps this was due in part to the manner in which her hair was dressed. She seemed frail, the pallor of her complexion emphasized by the unadorned sombreness of her simple black gown. Her general air was what would be called aristocratic, and the languor of her motions accentuated this impression.

It had been a mild day and the chill of the evening had not as yet made itself felt. Still, Mrs. Bernstein wore a light silk shawl, and, as she seated herself, she drew it around her rather tightly as though she were in need of its warmth. She appeared to be in deep contemplation, although, from time to time, her glance wandered about the room. A close observer would have noted that she did not actually recognize the furnishings upon which her glance rested, as she apparently passed

in review the various objects of use and adornment, which filled but did not crowd the apartment.

And yet, in a manner, the room was crowded, although there was not much in it. A davenport, several chairs, a table on which stood a lamp and a few books, a modest bookcase, well filled with a variety of volumes which somehow had the air of having been read. That was all of the furniture. What there was of it was in excellent taste, not expensive but surely not cheap. Not a pretentious array, and, although the room was small, a consideration of these items would compel the decision that they were neither too many nor too large for it.

On the walls, papered in a neutral buff, were hung a number of neatly framed prints, all of them reproductions of pictures of acknowledged merit, and two large portraits in oil, heavily framed in gold. It was these two pictures which crowded the room. They simply shouted for attention, and they monopolized the view of the casual beholder. They represented, or rather misrepresented, a man and a woman. The artist who had painted them must have had some ocular defect which made him insensitive to perspective, and another which interfered with his accurate observation of color. Stark, staring portraits they were, unnatural, impossible. They looked ancient, utterly out of date, although obviously they were not more than thirty years old; the costume of the woman determined that.

But Mrs. Bernstein was used to them. She no longer saw them; they were part of the wall and they imposed themselves upon her consciousness only when their frames required dusting. As she sat there, absorbed in thought, she was not conscious of her physical surroundings, even the traffic of the street below her did not reach her mind.

She had been sitting there for fully fifteen minutes when the sound of a key, inserted in the lock, caused her to look up attentively. Immediately the door opened and Ruth Bernstein entered. But a Ruth Bernstein totally different from Hardwick's assistant. The demureness was all gone, and, in its place, an alacrity, a vivacity that bespoke youth, health, happiness.

"Hello," she said gaily, coming to her mother and kissing her, "how were you today?"

"Not so well," answered Mrs. Bernstein. There was a plaintive note in her voice, almost querulous.

"What seemed to be the matter?" asked Ruth solicitously.

"It's very hard to say. I've been just miserable. I haven't felt able to do a single thing. I'm as weak as a cat."

"Have you been taking your medicine?" asked Ruth, who had taken off her hat and had come over and seated herself on a footstool beside Mrs. Bernstein's chair.

"No, not today," was the answer, "I don't think

that medicine's doing me one bit of good. I feel much worse when I take it."

"Was the doctor here?"

"No, and I'm getting tired of him. He's so unsympathetic. I told him the other day that I had been reading about Bright's disease and that I thought the symptoms which were mentioned coincided almost exactly with my own."

"Well?" asked Ruth, as her mother paused.

"He just laughed at me. I was so mortified that I didn't know what to say. I was so put out that I couldn't tell you at first. But what he said next was worse."

"What was that?"

"He said that there wasn't anything the matter with me, and the sooner that I agreed with him the quicker I'd be well. Did you ever hear anything so ridiculous?" Mrs. Bernstein looked her indignation.

"Well, mother, there's something in what he says. You know the first step towards getting well is believing that you're going to. It's a great help."

"I've heard that before," answered Mrs. Bernstein, "but it doesn't apply to my case. Nobody can tell me anything about myself. I know there's something terribly wrong with me. I'm just miserable all of the time." A tear trickled down her cheek.

Ruth's arms were about her mother's neck immediately. "There!" she said, "Don't pay any attention

to that old fool of a doctor. We'll call in another. We'll go to some big specialist downtown, someone who'll know just what to do for you." She kissed and patted her mother just as one would a child, and presently Mrs. Bernstein was calmer.

When her mother was again in moderate spirits, she was seldom really cheerful for more than a few minutes at a time, Ruth began upon the subject which interested her most actively at the moment.

"What have we got for dinner?" she asked.

"There's a steak, and I thought we'd have some French fried potatoes, and there's lettuce and a canteloupe. I pared the potatoes and washed the lettuce, but I didn't have the strength to do any more."

"That's all right. I don't mind cooking," answered Ruth brightly, "just wait 'til I put on my apron and then you come into the kitchen and we'll talk while I get things ready. I won't be a moment." She ran out of the room.

A few minutes later she reappeared, her dress entirely covered by a long apron. "Come, mother," she said, and went into the kitchenette, a tiny little room, not much larger than an average closet. Mrs. Bernstein followed her, and took a seat just outside of the door for the very good reason that if both of them entered, it would have been impossible for either of them to move.

Ruth set about the preparation of the meal, gaily

humming a tune. For a while her mother sat in silence, but presently she spoke:

"Your Aunt Sarah was here today."

"Well, what did that old busybody have to say?" asked Ruth cheerfully.

"Oh! Ruth!" expostulated Mrs. Bernstein. "That's not respectful to your father's sister."

Ruth laughed. "It isn't my fault that she's my father's sister, is it?" Mrs. Bernstein made a gesture of deprecation, but said nothing, so Ruth continued. "And it surely isn't my fault that she's a busybody. What was she complaining about today?"

"She wasn't complaining about anything. She—" Mrs. Bernstein paused.

"Well, what did she have to say?"

"Oh! nothing in particular."

"Didn't she say something about me? Something about my getting married, didn't she?"

"She was talking about Horace Gerson. He's a splendid fellow, everybody likes him—"

"And he's so successful in business," put in Ruth, rather sarcastically.

"Well, that's nothing against him, is it?" asked her mother.

"Oh! I don't mind Horace and I surely am glad he's getting along, provided he lets me alone. I don't dislike him except when I'm with him and then he just bores me stiff."

"I don't see what's the matter with him. He's very well educated."

"You mean he went to college. That doesn't mean that he's educated."

"He's as well educated as Fred Pemberton," said Mrs. Bernstein. There was just enough tartness in her tone to make her remark unpleasant to Ruth.

"That depends," she answered. "Fred never went to college unless you count a term in a business college. Education is a pretty big thing, and some men might spend their whole lives in a college or university and not be educated when they were through. Fred doesn't know a lot of things that I suppose are very nice to know, but he's got a mind. He's a real man."

"You're not going to marry him, are you Ruth?" asked her mother anxiously.

"I don't know," answered her daughter seriously. "Sometimes I think I will and sometimes I think I won't."

"I don't approve of mixed marriages," said Mrs. Bernstein. "I don't think they bring happiness."

"Well, mother," answered Ruth, brightly, "we won't have to settle that this evening anyway. So let's talk about something else."

But Mrs. Bernstein was not to be put off. "I don't see what you find to admire in him anyway," she said.

"Oh! There's a lot about him to admire. For one thing, he's the most masterful man I've ever met. He

just naturally takes first place, no matter whom he's with. Why, down at the office—"

"But when he's here," interrupted Mrs. Bernstein, "he scarcely has a word to say to me. He doesn't even half listen to me when I talk to him. I don't know how he is with you, but he's a regular dummy when I'm with him."

"He's not much on ordinary small talk, I'll admit," answered Ruth. "He has no patience for it. Things are too real for him; he's too intense."

"But what does he talk about to you?" asked her mother.

"Lots of things. About people mostly. He has the most wonderful understanding of people. He just puts his finger on their weaknesses. When he starts on that subject I'm just spellbound. But here, the steak's ready now and if you'll move into the dining room I'll have dinner on the table in a jiffy."

Mrs. Bernstein did as she was asked and, in a few minutes, they were seated at the table enjoying their plain but substantial meal. Both of them ate with relish and, if the elder lady was as much of an invalid as she claimed, she was fortunate in the fact that her ailment, whatever it might be, did not affect her appetite.

They ate in silence for a while, a silence broken only by remarks incidental to their present occupation, remarks entirely necessary. When the fine edge of their appetites was worn off, they fell into conversation, Mrs. Bernstein beginning with:

"Mrs. Williams stopped in for a minute this morning. What do you think she wanted?"

"I suppose she wanted to borrow some butter or an egg," answered Ruth with a smile. Mrs. Williams lived in the flat immediately over the Bernsteins, and was given to running out of necessary supplies at short notice.

"No," answered Mrs. Bernstein seriously, "she asked me to join her Red Cross Auxiliary. What do you think of that?"

"I think it would be fine," answered Ruth, enthusiastically.

"Do you think I'm strong enough?" asked her mother anxiously.

"How often would you have to go?"

"One day a week. Mrs. Williams said a half day would be enough."

"I think it would be splendid. It would take you out of yourself."

"Well, I don't know about that," said Mrs. Bernstein, doubtfully. "But I'd really like to do something to help in the war."

"That's why it would be such a fine thing for you. I wish you'd try it."

"I think I will. I told Mrs. Williams I'd let her know to-morrow."

CHAPTER XIII

MRS. BERNSTEIN returned from her first afternoon's attendance at the Red Cross Auxiliary in a state of high enthusiasm. Ruth had come home a quarter of an hour earlier and was busy in the kitchenette when her mother entered. Instead of the usual complaint which met her daughter's inquiry as to her health, she launched immediately into a recital of her impressions.

"It's simply wonderful, Ruth, the way those women work and the good they do. And they're not ordinary women either. Some of them are rich, they come and go in their automobiles. They're all very friendly. It just seems as though this war was going to make us all more democratic. Mrs. L. Percival Sedley's the chairman. You know what a howling swell she is. Well, she just went around and talked to everybody in the sweetest way, she put on no airs at all. And there was a friend of hers there who was with her all of the time, she just sort of danced attendance on her. Let me see, what was her name? Oh! yes; Mrs. Hardwick, Mrs. Henry W. Hardwick. I've never heard of her, but I imagine she must be pretty swell too. I don't judge from the way she looked, because she was really rather dowdy, but then that's the way with a lot of people whose position in society is assured—"

"Mrs. Henry W. Hardwick?" put in Ruth, "I wonder—"

But her mother was so much interested in telling of her experiences of the afternoon that she did not notice the interruption and went right on.

"You know we make surgical dressings. You've no idea how particular you have to be. You can't just cut out things and slap them together. Everything has to be measured carefully and folded to fit a certain size. And then they have to conserve the material too. You can't just cut out the piece you want any way. It all has to be figured out so that you get the most possible out of every yard. It takes some very careful counting. Just think, you have to get three pieces thirteen inches wide out of material that's thirty-eight inches. I don't know just how they do it. They were having a long discussion about it this afternoon and I didn't really hear how it was decided. Mrs. Hardwick was telling me some of the difficulties they have. It seems that the main headquarters of the Red Cross is run by a lot of regular dummies. They give orders to have things made a certain way and when they're made that way they calmly tell you that that isn't right and they have to be made all over again. Today we were making over some little bags that were made too big in the first place and we were making them smaller. I don't know what they'd do if they were made too small in the first place, you couldn't make them larger without wasting some material."

"Don't you suppose," asked Ruth, "that the time wasted in making those bags over might not be worth more than the material?"

"You don't understand," answered Mrs. Bernstein, "nobody's paid anything. It isn't as though we were paid for our time."

"Oh! I see," said Ruth. But what she meant her mother to understand was not her real thought. She saw the futility of attempting to communicate that.

Mrs. Bernstein talked continuously until they began their dinner. Even then, although she ate with her usual good appetite, she kept up with her story of the afternoon's happenings. It was not until they were quite through that she remembered that she was an invalid. She got up from the table and walked into the living room, where she sank into a chair, and sighed deeply.

"What's the matter?" called Ruth from the dining room, where she was clearing up the dinner things.

"Oh! I feel so weak. I'm afraid it was too much for me."

"You'll feel better in a minute or two. Just sit there quietly."

"Can't you come in here and sit with me for a little while? Maybe if you talked to me I'd feel better. You can clear up a little later this evening." Mrs. Bernstein's tone was most plaintive.

"I'm sorry," answered Ruth, "but I'll have to hustle. Mr. Pemberton's going to call this evening."

"Why didn't you tell me before?" asked her mother, rather querulously.

"I was so much interested in what you were telling me that I really didn't think of it."

"I wish you had selected another evening."

"Why?" asked Ruth. She felt her mother was rather unreasonable.

"You might have known that I'd be worn out after spending the day at the Auxiliary."

Ruth came to the door of the dining room and looked at Mrs. Bernstein. "Would you like me to call him up and tell him I'd rather he didn't come tonight because you're not feeling well?" she asked.

"I wouldn't hear of it," cried her mother. "You did that the last time he was to come. I don't want him to think I'm always sick."

"Very well," replied Ruth and went out into the kitchenette.

She returned in about half an hour to find her mother still sitting in the chair. She no longer looked uncomfortable or unhappy, she was sleeping quite peacefully.

Ruth smiled indulgently when she saw her. Noiselessly she went through the room setting things to rights and then went to her own room to dress. When she reappeared, Mrs. Bernstein was awake and surprised to see her daughter dressed.

"Are you dressed already?" she inquired. "You couldn't have been a minute."

"Oh! yes, I was. You've been asleep."

"No, I haven't. I just closed my eyes for a minute. What time is it?"

"Quarter after eight. He'll be here soon." And then the bell rang.

Pemberton came in, his usual serious expression lightened by a smile. He greeted Mrs. Bernstein with deference and inquired as to her health.

"I've been just miserable," answered the sufferer in a tone of deep conviction.

Pemberton tried to assume an air of solicitude which he was far from feeling.

"What seems to be the matter?" he asked.

"Oh! I can't imagine. I haven't the least bit of strength. I can't make the least effort without getting all tired out. I spent to-day at the Red Cross and it was too much for me. Ruth can tell you that I was completely worn out when I came home. It's dreadful to be so weak all of the time, I just feel as though I were good for nothing."

"What does your doctor say?" asked Pemberton. He was utterly bored but believed that he was bound to display interest.

"I have no patience with doctors. They're all alike. They have their pills and their medicines and their talk. They may be all right for some things, but a case like mine is beyond them. I thought the other day that I might be suffering from Bright's disease.

I had looked it up and found that my symptoms were exactly what the book said, but when I tried to tell them to my doctor he wouldn't even listen to me. He almost called me a fool and as much as told me that nothing at all was the matter with me. The whole trouble is that he isn't interested or that he doesn't understand my case and pretends that nothing is wrong. I suppose that I'll get well eventually by myself and then he'll claim all the credit for it. But I don't want to go on suffering one moment more than is necessary and there ought to be some doctor who would understand my case and save me all of this pain and anxiety."

Mrs. Bernstein would undoubtedly have kept up this patter on her favorite subject indefinitely had it not been that Ruth caught a look in Pemberton's face that indicated to her most plainly that he was being unduly bored by her mother's recital of her ills. She said:

"I want mother to consult a specialist on nervous diseases. Don't you think she ought?"

At the first sound of Ruth's voice Pemberton was all attention.

"By all means," he said to her, and then turning to Mrs. Bernstein, "You ought to consult Dr. Franklin."

This was the signal for a new speech by that lady in which she cited a number of uninteresting and unconvincing legends, serious errors chargeable to medical specialists. Again Ruth had to intervene and, finally, Mrs. Bernstein asked to be excused and retired to her room.

"Do you think your mother is really sick?" Pemberton asked of Ruth after they had heard the door close.

"I don't really know what's the matter," answered she, seriously. "There must be something. No one could keep on complaining constantly for nothing."

"I suppose not," said Pemberton, thoughtfully. He was silent for a moment and then added: "Perhaps it's just the need of complaining that's the matter. I don't know just how that would be treated, but I suppose a man like Franklin has many such cases. I had an aunt who was always saying that she was sick, but nobody ever paid much attention to her, least of all her husband."

Ruth was much interested. Pemberton scarcely ever mentioned any of his family. All that she knew was little more than the death of both of his parents while he was a boy of less than ten. "Tell me about her," she said.

"There isn't much to tell except that," he said slowly as though he were trying to remember something that the thought of his aunt brought to his mind. "I could tell you more about her husband, my mother's only brother. He was a fine old snoozer."

"How?" she asked.

"He was the man I worked for from the time I left school until I was thirty years old. He's the one man that actually used me. He took it out of me for fair." He paused, a mirthless smile on his lips. Ruth was silent.

She knew that questioning would bring her less than waiting. Presently Pemberton began again:

“I lived with my uncle after my parents’ death. When I was through at the high school he gave me a job in his hardware store. I worked there for about three years learning the business and getting the hang of things. He paid me rotten wages and took a good part of them for my board. I didn’t kick because I really didn’t know any better. Anyway, when I was nineteen I knew enough about the business for him to leave it mostly to me to run. I seemed to take to it naturally. It wasn’t long after that before I had got it into much better shape than it had ever been in before. I kept the stock up-to-date. We always had things when people wanted them. Before, we could scarcely ever fill a mixed order complete. And I got better prices from the manufacturers and the jobbers we bought from.

“In a little while you could see our trade increase. Carpenters and builders who had never dealt with us before came to us, attracted by the good looks of the place (I kept it in apple pie order) and our large assortment. That gave me the idea that we could get the call with a lot more people, so I induced my uncle to let me do some advertising. Not much at first, but it didn’t take long to get quite a number of new customers, and then it was easy to get the old man to let me go as far as I liked. The business kept on growing and one day, when I was about twenty-one, I heard my uncle tell a

friend of his that he had made nearly fifteen thousand dollars the last year. Think of that amount of money to make in a retail hardware store in a medium size town nearly fifteen years ago. Well, that put an idea into my head. The old snoozer was paying me just sixteen dollars a week at the time. I had never bothered about my pay. I just looked on it as my own business and enjoyed the work I did. You might say I enjoyed it, for it was the only thing I ever did, I worked nearly every night except when I was going to the business college. I only went there to get the hang of bookkeeping so that our bookkeeper couldn't put anything over me.

"Well, as I said, that gave me an idea. Here was I, running the whole business, and my uncle taking it easy and I was getting eight hundred a year and he was drawing down fifteen thousand. I spoke to him about it." Pemberton paused and the mirthless smile again played about his lips. He seemed scarcely conscious of Ruth's presence and told his story with no apparent effort to make an impression on her. It was as if he were simply remembering vocally. But Ruth's interest was intense; she hung on his every word, completely absorbed.

"Well," Pemberton resumed, "Uncle George didn't take very kindly to the proposition of raising my pay. He told me that I was his heir, he had no children of his own, and that, some day, the whole business would be mine. I told him I didn't want to wait for any dead man's shoes, and that I wanted something now. The upshot of

the whole discussion was that my wages were raised to twenty-five dollars, and I was to have an interest in the business in a few years.

“I was easy. I had had no other experience and as I never talked about my own affairs to anyone, I got no points from the outside. I took the old boy’s guff as though it were gospel and figured that whatever I could do to increase the business would come to me eventually, because my uncle was one of the tightest propositions that ever walked. He didn’t spend one cent more the last year of his life, and that year he made over thirty thousand dollars, than he did when his whole income was less than three thousand.

“After a while, I figured there were a number of lines that we could go into without materially increasing our expenses. We went into them and our business took another jump. Then I got the idea of opening stores in other towns, and that helped along too. By hard work I got my salary raised from time to time, and when I was twenty-five I braced my uncle for the interest in the business which he had promised me. But he put me off, giving me a raise in pay each time, until finally, when I was about twenty-nine, he agreed to take me in and give me a one-fifth interest on my thirtieth birthday, which was then about six months off. He even went so far as to have the papers drawn up.

“And then, just one month before my birthday, he was killed in an automobile accident. He left no will,

so everything went to his wife. She was sick in bed at the time, but she agreed to carry out his promise. And then she died, also without a will, and all of my uncle's money and business went to her relatives. One of her brothers took the business and offered me a good salary to stay, but wouldn't hear of giving me the promised interest. I quit."

Pemberton ceased talking and looked at Ruth. For the first time, he was aware of her intense interest, and it gave him a thrill of keen pleasure. He saw in her expression evidence of his ability to sway her, to compel her moods. Ruth was vaguely conscious of his feeling of triumph, was somewhat embarrassed by it and hastened to speak.

"It seems queer to think of anyone getting the better of you," she said, smiling, just a touch of banter in her tone.

"Not many have done it," he replied. "There's one other person that has." He paused and looked at her fixedly. She was rather uneasy under his gaze, she knew very well what was coming. "That person's you," he went on, "and the worst of it is that I know it and must let you have your own way about it."

"You wouldn't put me in your uncle's class, would you?" she asked, jokingly.

But he was in earnest. "Certainly not. You're in a class all by yourself."

"I don't know whether to take that as a compliment or not."

"Yes you do, when I say it," he said slowly, and then impulsively, "Ruth—"

But Ruth did not want to hear what she knew he was about to say. She held up her finger, and said mock-seriously, "Remember your promise."

"Why did you exact that promise?" he asked, suddenly dejected.

"Please, Fred," she answered coaxingly. "Don't let's go into that now. Give me the time I asked for. Let me make up my mind completely so that I can be sure I'll have no regrets."

He got up from his chair and walked over to the bookcase and made a show of reading the titles of some of the volumes on the top shelf. She sat and watched him in silence.

Presently he turned and came back to his chair. "Just as you say," he said in a manner which implied forced resignation.

"Just one word more," said Ruth, "and then we'll talk of other things. If you want me, you want all of me. There must be no doubts, no questions. I must be sure that I can come to you whole-hearted, ready to put my whole future in your hands without regret of any kind. You see, don't you?" There was an anxious note in her voice as she finished. Pemberton did not answer, but looked at her intently as though he would read in her face all of the emotion which lay back of her words.

"Oh! I wanted to tell you that mother met a Mrs.

Henry W. Hardwick at the Red Cross today. I wonder whether she could be the wife of our Mr. Hardwick. Do you know her?"

"No," he answered, "I've never met any of his family. He asked me if I would be willing to come to dinner at his house, that was the first day I met him, but I put him off. I never go out. I don't enjoy it. I never know what to say and what most people talk about doesn't interest me in the least."

"Don't you think that's just because you're not used to meeting people socially? Don't you think you may be missing a whole lot of pleasure?"

"Perhaps I am, but if I don't know it, I guess I'm no worse off. I've never had the opportunity to cultivate the social graces and I'm too old now to learn. At any rate, from what I see of people in business, I'd say they're a pretty scurvy lot. I wouldn't trust one in ten further than I could see them."

"That's because you've cultivated a habit of suspicion. You don't trust anybody."

"I'd trust you with anything," he said with conviction.

Ruth was of no mind to pursue the conversation in that direction and led him to talk of other things. He followed her lead and the rest of the evening was devoted to talk which avoided their mutual relation.

When he left at ten o'clock, he took with him a sense of bafflement, of having been held at arm's length, which

mitigated but could not greatly diminish the deep satisfaction which he always experienced in her presence.

Ruth closed the door behind him and went over to a mirror which hung on the wall near the door. She gazed at her reflection for some time, and then, with a sigh, turned away, and, after extinguishing the lights, went to her room.

CHAPTER XIV

THE Hardwicks came through the summer without undergoing any perceptible change, if exception is made for the physical growth of the two girls. The increase in their income produced no appreciable betterment in their mode of life, whether expressed in food, raiment, beauty or comfort, or any sensible diminution of their debts. The budget upon which Hardwick had insisted was never made. Instead, both he and his wife talked economy for about ten days and then the subject was dropped. From time to time, an old debt was reduced or discharged, and a new one contracted to take its place. But they were more or less used to it. Mrs. Hardwick was totally unconcerned and her husband was indifferent and worried by turns. Most of the time he did not think of the matter.

Their usual visit to Hardwick senior's farm took place in the last weeks of August. The family spent ten days there, each of which began with the resolution on the part of Henry Hardwick to ask his father for a loan and each of which ended without his having found the necessary courage. Mrs. Hardwick prodded him from day to day upon his dilly-dallying but went no further. She did not dare to broach the subject directly to her father-in-law, because she knew that his dislike of her was basic, ineradicable. The only condition upon which

they could meet was what might be described as armed neutrality. Any overt action on the part of either would be bound to result in immediate open belligerency.

After their return to the city, Hardwick wrote to his father asking for a loan of three thousand dollars. He set forth in his letter his recent increase in income and his consequent expectation of repaying the loan at the rate of one thousand dollars a year. He apologized for making the appeal and professed to be so much ashamed of it that he had not been able to find the courage to make the demand in his father's presence. He added a statement of his deep appreciation of his father's constant kindness to him, the recognition of which made him confident of the success of this appeal.

The answer came promptly and was a complete surprise. It contained a check for five hundred dollars and an announcement of his father's intended marriage to a young woman of the neighborhood. The five hundred dollars, added to the amount previously loaned, was figured to cover Henry's complete legal claim to a share in his father's estate.

Mrs. Hardwick was furious. "To think of that poor old fool, at his time of life, being ensnared by the wiles of some rustic Dulcinea," she exclaimed. "If I allowed myself the use of strong language," she continued, "I should call it disgusting. There is no more pitiful sight than that of a grey-bearded man, of an age supposed to be venerable, attempting to relight the fires of youth

by dalliance with a young woman and particularly, as in this case, where her only motive is mercenary."

Hardwick was so much disappointed that he was inclined to share his wife's resentment, but her expression of it aroused only antagonism to her and he therefore took his father's part.

"How can you say that, Florrie?" he asked. "You don't even know her." This was injudicious, for it opened the vials of her wrath upon him.

"I may not have the honor of the acquaintance of this particular person," she said, with her customary cackle, "but I know her type. And I know your father, and, I say it with regret, the regret based upon actual personal experience, I know his son. The same quality of vacillation, the same weakness of will, the same lack of resolution mark you both. It is just like you to defend him in this unwarrantable proceeding. I suppose you will be the first to rush to your stepmother and to place the seal of your approval upon this unnatural union. I wash my hands of it," she said in closing, with a magnificent gesture.

Hardwick did not pursue the subject further. He wrote his father a letter of congratulation and thanks, in both of which he was thoroughly sincere. His first disappointment passed, he was quite willing to admit his father's perfect freedom to do as he saw fit with his own life.

By this time Hardwick was thoroughly accustomed

to his position. His first enthusiasm had cooled and he was attending to his duties somewhat perfunctorily. He did not actually fail to do any work which came to him, but, on the other hand, he did not seek it. More and more he depended on Ruth Bernstein, who, always willing, always ready, took from his hands task after task which properly should have been discharged by him. She intrigued him as much as ever, their acquaintance not having made a single step in the three months they had been together. Ruth was a complete enigma to him, and he was an equally complete enigma to her. But, while he made a question of her personality from the human, the social side, she wondered how it could be possible that a man with so much at stake should be so lax with regard to his business.

She had been quick to observe his growing indifference. At first, it had appeared to her as only a passing lack of interest, one of those variations to which almost everybody is liable. Her first feeling, when evidence of his incapacity for sustained effort was apparent to her, was that it was simply an off day, but, as indications of his aberration continued, she was compelled to the decision that what she saw was not unusual but was one of his inherent, incorrigible traits. Even then, perhaps because she had championed his cause before Pemberton, she was anxious to shield him, to save him from the penalty that she was sure that the business manager would impose. This was instinctive purely;

she did not reason it, nor did she in any way look upon her attitude introspectively.

For some utterly inscrutable reason, Mrs. Hardwick had been attracted by Mrs. Bernstein. She knew nothing of the association of the latter's daughter with her husband in the business of the Prescott Manufacturing Company. Not that Hardwick had failed repeatedly to mention Miss Bernstein in his talks at home about what happened at the office, it was simply that Mrs. Hardwick never listened to her husband's remarks on any subject which did not immediately concern her own interests. At all events, even if the name of Bernstein lingered in a corner of her memory, she did not connect it with the woman to whom she had been attracted at the Red Cross Auxiliary.

Mrs. Bernstein, it may be observed, had been much awed by Mrs. Hardwick's close intimacy, as she saw it, with the commanding personality of Mrs. L. Percival Sedley. The immediate result of this awe had been a deferential attention to Mrs. Hardwick's volubility and a desire to show a sympathetic interest in that lady's remarks, which she really felt because, in her opinion, the gates of the mighty were being opened to her. Mrs. Hardwick surely did not bore her.

This may have been the reason for their mutual attraction, and it may very well not have been. Perhaps it was even the result rather than the cause. But, whatever it was, the attraction was undoubted, and,

as they met again and again at the sessions of the auxiliary, their acquaintance ripened into a sort of friendship.

Mrs. Hardwick was vocal on all matters which held her interest. She was always happy, but, from the fact that she was almost always talking, it might be inferred that her happiness depended upon her constant speech. It might also be argued that she talked continually because she was always happy. But that would be quibbling, and quibbling about a matter of the utmost unimportance. At all events, it was natural, in the discourses to which her husband was compelled to listen, that the name of Mrs. Bernstein should figure frequently.

At first, Hardwick paid scant attention. His wife's insistent verbosity had schooled him to appear to listen rather than actually to consider the import of her speech. But iteration, even when our interest is not actively engaged, is bound to attract attention. The constant recurrence of the name of Bernstein at last moved him to mention the coincidence one evening when they were sitting in the dining room while their daughters were washing the dishes. It was the maid's night out.

"I wonder if she's related to Ruth Bernstein, my assistant?" he asked.

"She may very well be," answered Mrs. Hardwick, "the name is rather uncommon."

"I don't think it's uncommon among Jews," he said.

Mrs. Hardwick, as usual, was not listening to him.

"Coming to think of it," she said, "Mrs. Bernstein did mention that she had a daughter who was employed in some business or other. It might very well be that your assistant is her daughter. What sort of a girl is she?"

"She's a mighty good looking girl for one thing. She's neither dark nor fair—"

"Oh! I don't mean her looks. Of what possible importance do you think that can be? What I wished to know was her mental quality and attainments, her intellectuality."

"She's damned clever at her work," answered Hardwick.

"Henry," expostulated his wife with an indulgent severity, "can you never learn to eschew vulgar expressions? To me they represent nothing but a complete bankruptcy of accurate, forceful diction. You say 'damned clever.' Do you suppose that carries half the emphasis that would be contributed by the expression 'undeniably efficient in the discharge of her duties'?"

Henry did not answer. He knew it would be of no use. Mrs. Hardwick continued:

"I make no doubt that she is a young woman of both quality and attainments, if I may judge from the impression that her mother has made upon me. '*Bon chien chasse de race*' is a proverb which is founded upon

a most accurate observation of humanity." Mrs. Hardwick felt that she had made a fine period and beamed upon her husband, looking for the admiration which she felt that she had earned.

Hardwick, who was thinking of something else, smiled his approval. He did not care to confess his ignorance of the meaning of the French proverb although Mrs. Hardwick knew very well that he did not understand the language. After a suitable pause, she continued:

"Mrs. Bernstein is one of the sweetest little women I have ever met. She has beautiful manners; she never pushes herself forward, depending rather upon the knowledge that the perfect correction of her manner will win the approval of the judicious. If there is one thing which I despise more than another, it is forwardness, the vulgar pushing of one's self to the fore regardless of merit. It is the absence of this disagreeable trait which I so much admire in Mrs. Bernstein. I have made her my friend and I hope to become quite intimate with her, even outside of the Red Cross."

"But she's a Jew, isn't she?" asked Hardwick, and without waiting for an answer, went on: "We don't want to associate with Jews."

"And why not, pray?" asked Mrs. Hardwick rather indignantly. "What is the basis of your dislike of Jews? I call it a mere vulgar prejudice of the very sort which Wells defines so accurately in 'The Research Magnificent.' "

"Call it a prejudice, if you like," answered Hardwick, "but I've got it."

"Henry, I marvel at you. A man who has the least pretension to mentality should be above prejudice of any kind. However," she went on, "in this case I shall not let your ideas affect me. I shall not be deterred from forming a valuable friendship by your mediæval views." Mrs. Hardwick, it may be observed, never let her husband's views upon any subject affect any action which she contemplated. Her pronouncement in this case was just so much more vocal pleasure.

Hardwick got up from the table and went into the cluttered-up living room. He picked up the evening paper and had just become interested in an article, when his wife came into the room, her knitting materials in her hands, and seated herself near him. She was not silent long.

"Henry, my dear," she said, her tone again unctuous as usual, "you did not answer my question as to Miss Bernstein's intellectual quality."

Hardwick was deep in the article he was reading and heard her question without taking in its import.

"What's that?" he asked.

"I remarked that you had failed to answer the question I put to you concerning Miss Bernstein's intellectuality. If she's at all like her mother, I have no doubt of it. What did you say her name was?"

"Ruth. How do you know the woman you've met is the mother of the girl in the office?"

"The coincidence is far too striking to permit any other hypothesis. As I remarked before, the name of Bernstein is uncommon, the Mrs. Bernstein I met has a daughter engaged in some commercial pursuit; you have a young woman in your office of that name. That makes it a perfectly clear case. Well, I was saying to your assistant's mother that I found it difficult, at the Red Cross, to undertake a real conversation and that I hoped she would come to see me some afternoon when she was disengaged. In fact, I went further; I offered to call on her if the opportunity presented itself. She was very sweet about it and expressed the greatest pleasure at the prospect of becoming better acquainted."

"I don't see why you want to be fussing about with people like that," remarked Hardwick, and resumed the reading of the paper. Her husband's words and his lack of interest in her talk as evidenced by his absorption in the newspaper spurred Mrs. Hardwick to throw down the gage of battle.

"You don't see why I fuss, I believe 'fuss' is the word you used, with 'people like that;' I believe I quote you accurately; well, you may be able to see the reason for it, because I shall have Mrs. Bernstein and her daughter here for dinner on Wednesday next." Mrs. Hardwick delivered herself of this remark in a most bellicose tone; she appeared to wish that he would oppose her.

"Have her here if you wish," answered Hardwick, "and all of her relatives too, but I won't come home to dinner that evening. I'll stay in town."

"Oh! No, you won't," answered Mrs. Hardwick with conviction. "You'll come home just as usual and you'll behave exactly as you would with any other guests we might entertain. I have no fear of your undertaking to hold me up to ridicule in that way. When I invited Mrs. Bernstein to dine here," Mrs. Hardwick either forgot or wilfully ignored the fact that she had had no intention of asking the Bernsteins to dinner until Henry had shown his antagonism to them. "When I invited Mrs. Bernstein to dine here," she repeated, "I had expressly in mind the thought that you would be delighted to make the acquaintance of so superior a woman. You will be at home without doubt; your opposition is the merest childishness."

And Hardwick, although he did not answer, knew that she was right.

CHAPTER XV

MRS. BERNSTEIN demurred at accepting Mrs. Hardwick's invitation to dinner, particularly because Ruth was included. It would have been very easy to decline on the score of unwillingness to leave the latter alone, but it was even more difficult to accept for her. Mrs. Bernstein was well aware that to accept for Ruth would call for some protest on the part of that young woman and, therefore, she hesitated. But Mrs. Bernstein's hesitation was not considered by Mrs. Hardwick. To her it was only a delay, longer or shorter according to her mood. In this case she allowed it to be rather longer than usual because she really was very fond of Mrs. Bernstein and her one great manner of showing her affection was to allow her friend the opportunity to say a few words. She did this unconsciously, of course, for, strange as it may seem, Mrs. Hardwick had no idea that she talked much and would have resented the imputation most vigorously.

After Mrs. Bernstein had made her few objections, Mrs. Hardwick took it for granted that the invitation was accepted and said so with the utmost definiteness. She had not even deigned to answer the objections. Mrs. Bernstein really wished to go, her only fear in

the whole matter was the impending discussion with her daughter.

However, that discussion came to its inevitable end, and on Wednesday evening the two Bernstein ladies presented themselves at the Hardwick house. The door was opened by Marian, who introduced herself promptly and in a manner that charmed both of the visitors. That was their first impression and it was most favorable. The second was made by the furnishing of Mrs. Hardwick's hall. This left them almost breathless. Ruth, in particular, could not permit her glance to rest upon any one feature of the dreadful conglomeration; other features constantly encroached upon her field of vision and attracted her attention. During the two minutes which elapsed before the appearance of their hostess, Ruth's eyes traveled round and round the room with the result that she was almost bewildered.

Mrs. Hardwick greeted her guests effusively. She was quite ready, metaphorically, to take her friend's daughter to her arms without any test. She apologized for "dear Henry's" delay in appearing, setting it down to his late return from the office. At length, he came down stairs, attired in a dinner jacket, and greeted Ruth as an old friend, while he acknowledged the introduction to her mother courteously. The latter made a distinctly favorable impression. Indeed, she looked very well this evening, having gone to some trouble in the matter of her dress.

Until they were summoned to the table, the talk, mostly from the mouth of the hostess, had for its object the establishment of sufficient reciprocal knowledge to permit of general conversation. Mrs. Hardwick explained to her husband who the Bernsteins were, repeating various items which she had learned from the elder, and to the guests she told what she felt necessary of her own family. She dwelt upon her regret at Alice's absence at college. She was sure that it would be a keen disappointment to her not to have been at home on this most auspicious occasion.

At table Mrs. Hardwick had Mrs. Bernstein on her right and Marian on her left. Hardwick sat between Mrs. Bernstein and Ruth. The meal began with rather disjointed conversation. Mrs. Hardwick was busy giving orders in stage whispers to her little incompetent maid, who, although she had been most carefully instructed as to her duties, completely forgot everything she had been told when it was most important that she should remember.

The meal was most generous in quantity and niggardly in quality. In fact, the food was poorly cooked and execrably served. But politeness is stronger than appetite and makes us eat in company what we would reject when alone. The inferior quality of the food, however, served the purpose of restoring Mrs. Bernstein's aplomb by removing much of the awe which she felt in Mrs. Hardwick's presence. She knew that in

this particular, at least, she was the superior of her hostess. Mrs. Hardwick, on the other hand, was perfectly delighted with her dinner and was sure that her guests must be impressed by this additional proof of her complete versatility.

When the meal was well under way, the hostess began what was intended as general conversation, but which was directed principally at Mrs. Bernstein. She seized upon some totally irrelevant remark to call attention to her literary work.

"It is just as I wrote in my essay on Rousseau in the University Magazine. You have seen it, I believe," she said, with a smirk, looking directly at her guest on the right. "It is a pity that a publication of such pre-eminent quality should have so limited a circulation. I suppose, however, that it is scarcely to be expected to interest the *hoi polloi*, it is rather 'caviare to the general.' The number of those who are interested in the purely intellectual is bound to be restricted. I am convinced that an effort should be made to bring erudite thought to a larger audience and it appears to me that the surest avenue is the daily newspaper. To that end I am writing a series of articles," and so on.

Mrs. Bernstein was spellbound by the fluency of her hostess. She was not much interested in the higher education of the people, beginning with herself, but she was seized with the desire for expression and, at the first pause for breath on the part of Mrs. Hardwick, she opened upon her favorite topic.

"It's remarkable, Mrs. Hardwick," she said, "how a woman with a family should find time to do so much. I wouldn't have the strength. Indeed, for more than a year I have been feeling miserable all of the time. I awake in the morning with a feeling of intense depression. I feel just as though it is going to be impossible for me to get out of bed. Ruth can tell you how many mornings in the week it is absolutely necessary for her to give me my breakfast in bed. It's hard on her, I know, but—"

But Mrs. Hardwick could wait no longer.

"It is a puzzle to me how I do manage to get so much done," she said with unconcealed pride, "but I do get it done. I suppose it is simply by the exercise of an indomitable will power. I have always been like that. My ambition is simply relentless, it gives me no rest. Early in my married life, I determined that I should devote a part of each day to intellectual pursuits, and I have held to that resolution implacably. And I have done it without allowing my household to suffer, the health of the children is ample evidence of that. I have always chosen to care for them myself; it is a charge by much too sacred to be put in the hands of servants. In that respect, I have always sacrificed myself to whatever extent was necessary and I do not regret it." She paused for the admiration to which she felt herself entitled, but Mrs. Bernstein saw another opportunity and held forth.

"I always enjoyed good health until last year. Ruth

can tell you how vigorous and active I always have been. But in the last year my whole life has changed. You cannot imagine the misery I have suffered. Only the other day, I remarked to my sister-in-law, Mr. Bernstein's sister, Mrs. Elias, you may have heard of her or, at least, of her husband, he's a member of the firm of Price, Elias and Company, manufacturers of underwear. I was saying to her—"

"Price, Elias and Company," interrupted Mrs. Hardwick. "Of course I have heard of them. They have an office on Market street. And isn't Mrs. Price a constant attendant at the University Extension Lectures? I have met her there. I spoke to her about my work one day and sent her a copy of the magazine containing my article. She was good enough to give it the warmest praise. I'm sure she would be much interested in a little monograph I am writing at present on Fielding. I hope to arouse an interest in the father of the modern English novel which will open his pages to a new host of enthusiastic readers."

Mrs. Bernstein's knowledge of Fielding was confined strictly to what she had just heard from Mrs. Hardwick's lips. Slight as this knowledge was, it contented her. Besides, she was interested in another subject.

"I was saying to my sister-in-law only the other day that it seemed as though it was impossible to find a doctor who would really understand my case. My regular doctor makes no effort to find out what is the matter

with me. He simply pooh-poohs everything I say to him. He gives me medicine that doesn't do me a bit of good. I know that because I forgot to take it twice in succession and I didn't feel one bit worse. I have been thinking of making a change and a friend of ours recommended that I consult Dr. Franklin. Do you know anything about him?"

"Oh! Yes. He is said to be very good. He is the brother of the writer, James L. Franklin, who writes the most charming essays on literary and other subjects. Do you find time for reading?" she asked, turning to Ruth.

"Not as much as I would like to," she answered.

Mrs. Hardwick thereupon opened the floodgates upon Ruth and talked to her almost continuously during the rest of the meal. Mrs. Bernstein consequently seized upon Hardwick and treated him to a lengthy discourse upon her ills which would have bored him exceedingly if he had been compelled to pay close attention to her words. This, however, was entirely unnecessary, as Mrs. Bernstein did not listen to the occasional monosyllables which he felt that duty compelled. Indeed, by mistake, he once said "no" when the obvious reply was "yes," but she did not notice it.

After dinner, they sat in the hall and Mrs. Hardwick furnished not only most of the talk but the subject as well. Her digestion was most remarkable not merely because of the kind of food which it assimilated but also because it functioned in spite of her constant verbal

activity. Hardwick was used to her volubility and did not mind it as far as his own comfort was concerned. He knew that there was no use in waiting for her to run down because she scarcely ever did that. He wanted to talk to Ruth. This was his first opportunity in the three months he had known her and he determined to make use of it. While the stream of his wife's speech flowed on undammed he pondered upon an opening for a talk with Ruth.

She was sitting on the davenport with Marian, while all of the others were seated on chairs. Presently Hardwick stood up and then walked over to the davenport and sat down beside her. In a low tone, so as not to break into his wife's discourse, he asked her playfully:

"What do you think of our little good-for-nothing?" indicating Marian.

"I wouldn't care to tell you in her presence," she answered smiling.

"Shall I go away?" said Marian, entering into the spirit of play.

"Oh! No," answered her father. "Stay, you know listeners never hear any good of themselves."

"We'll make this an exception," said Ruth. "I think she's a very lovely little girl, or perhaps I had better say 'young lady.'"

"Oh! I'm no young lady," cried Marian, "Allie's the young lady of the family."

"There'll be plenty of time for that later," said Hard-

wick to both of them, and then, addressing Ruth, "Are you fond of children?"

"Very," she answered, "but I get little opportunity to meet them. Our only relatives in the city are my aunt and uncle, and their children are really grown up."

"Do you go out much?" inquired Hardwick. His interest was quite keen, he had always wanted to know more about her.

"Very little," she replied. "Usually when I come home from the office, I'm too tired to want to do anything. Besides, we don't keep a maid and I have most of the housework to do in the evening." She spoke straightforwardly; there was no plea for sympathy in her tone, she did not seem to consider her lot at all extraordinary.

"But there must be some young men, or perhaps one young man."

"Strange to say, there isn't even one," she replied, smilingly.

"You'll never get me to believe that," he said, banteringly, "it's impossible that there are not some aspirants for your favor."

"If there are, they haven't informed me of their aspirations."

"What do you do for enjoyment? You must do something."

"Well, sometimes we go to the theatre or to a concert."

"You must be musical. Most—" he was going to say "Jews," but he thought that a term of reproach, so he

avoided the word, and, after a barely perceptible pause, added "young ladies are. Do you play?"

"No," she answered. "I took a few lessons while my father was living, but, after his death, we couldn't afford it, so I had to give it up."

"I can't get it into my head that there shouldn't be any young men. It doesn't seem natural. Don't you know any?"

"Of course I know some, but, really, they don't interest me."

"What's the matter with them?"

"I really couldn't tell you. They just don't interest me and I guess I don't interest them either."

"I don't believe that. It isn't natural. I believe there is someone and you don't want to admit it."

Ruth was silent. Her expression, which had been most pleasant, now took on a more serious air. Hardwick noticed it and, suddenly, there came to him a recollection of Miss Henderson's remark concerning Pemberton's interest in Ruth. He wondered if, after all, there might not be something in the girl's gossip. With the idea of getting some light on this subject, he turned the talk to the office.

"I suppose you're so wrapped up in your work at the office that you haven't any mind for social pleasures?" he said questioningly.

"Oh! I don't know. It's awfully interesting though."

"Did you ever have any other position?"

"No, this is my first and only."

"Were you there before Mr. Pemberton came?"

"Yes, nearly two years."

"Did he make many changes?"

"I should say so," she answered enthusiastically.

"He's all business, isn't he?"

"At the office, surely."

"Why, have you ever met him socially?"

Ruth was vexed. She did not want to admit that there was any intimacy between her and Pemberton nor was she willing to lie about it. She knew she could change the subject and that Hardwick's politeness would keep him from pressing a question which, evidently, she did not wish to answer, but that would be a tacit admission. She determined to cut off further inquiries of this nature and said in a tone which she intentionally made matter-of-fact:

"Of course I've met him socially on several occasions, but he has no interest in social matters. He lives for his work and its quality shows how much it is to him. He's a self-made man. He came here from the West practically unknown, and today there's nobody in the line who hasn't heard of him. Don't you think he's a splendid man to work for?"

Hardwick agreed and they went on to talk of business only. Ruth took good care not to offer him another opening. Their further talk was of short duration, however, for Mrs. Hardwick wanted a listener who was

content with a silent role, and Mrs. Bernstein insisted on talking whenever she had an opportunity or, rather, whenever she could make one. Ruth was quite content to listen to her hostess without taking an active part in the conversation; perhaps it would be better to say, without unduly interrupting that lady's soliloquy. And Hardwick, thus thrown again into the current of Mrs. Bernstein's stream of narrated ills, kept himself afloat as best he could.

At nine-thirty the guests departed after an exchange of courtesies usual under the circumstances. As they walked down the street, Mrs. Bernstein asked:

"What did you think of Mrs. Hardwick? Isn't she awfully clever?"

"I don't know whether she's clever or not, but I must say that she's a woman who would be very interesting to anyone who was interested in her pet subject."

"Her pet subject! Why, what's that?" asked Mrs. Bernstein, mystified.

"Herself. She never talks about anything else and she talks about that incessantly. I've never met a worse bore."

"Ruth! How can you say so?"

"I pity her poor husband. Think of having that every day in the week, every week in the year. And that poor, lovely child. Did you ever see anyone less becomingly dressed? And what did you think of the dinner? Ugh!"

"The dinner wasn't very good," admitted Mrs. Bernstein, "but you see she's a very intellectual woman and probably doesn't bother about ordinary domestic affairs. I really think she's very brilliant."

Meanwhile their hosts were discussing them. Mrs. Hardwick was delighted. She was filled with the consciousness of having entertained, not magnificently, but well as regards the material aspect and munificently otherwise—"a real feast of reason and flow of soul" as she expressed it to her husband.

"It's really a kindness to entertain people like that," she said as she undressed. "They never go anywhere and never meet any people, certainly not intellectual people. Mrs. Bernstein is a lovely woman and her daughter is one of the most interesting girls I have ever met. Her views on every subject which the brief opportunity at my disposal enabled me to bring up showed the soundest reasoning. I hope to be of great service to her. I shall suggest instructive, interesting books for her and then I shall discuss them with her, thus arousing and stimulating her liking for profitable literature." And much, much more in the same strain.

Hardwick did not answer. He would have enjoyed expressing his opinion of Mrs. Bernstein's continuous recital of her maladies and the boredom he had suffered, but he knew that it would cause his wife to rush to the defense of her new friend and thus compel his attention when he wished to use it to consider a matter which had occurred to him.

Hardwick was now confident that Pemberton and Ruth were at least intimate friends. He could not have given a satisfactory reason for his belief, but it was not the less certain on that account. While he was thinking of this relationship between the two people with whom his business brought him most closely into contact, he was suddenly seized by the consciousness that he had not been holding to his original determination to make a great success of this position. And no one could be more fully aware of his dereliction than Ruth. He was conscience-stricken, at least that was how he would have described it. Actually, he was seized by the fear of being found out and in the semi-panic which was usual with him when some disagreeable idea controlled him, he resolved that he would forthwith mend his ways and exhibit the same interest and activity in his work which had marked it at the beginning.

CHAPTER XVI

UNDER the spell of his re-born resolution, Hardwick arrived at the office very early the next morning and was seated at his desk, going over his mail, when Ruth came in. Her pleasant greeting indicated none of the surprise which his unusual punctuality occasioned her, and the greeting accomplished, she took off her hat and jacket and began her work. Presently, he called her and asked:

"When do you usually begin work on the annual catalogue?"

"Let me see," she said, trying to recall the matter to her mind, "Oh! yes. Last year we put the copy in the printer's hands in the first week of October. I think you'll find a memorandum of it in the slip I gave you on the first of September." This was the second week in October.

"When do we mail it?" he asked.

"The first week of the new year, usually. But it doesn't have to be out quite so early as that, the second or third week would do as well."

"I'd like to go over the matter with you this morning."

"Very well, Mr. Hardwick. Now?"

"No, when I am through with my mail." He turned back to his work and Ruth went to her desk. Hardwick

was all business this morning. He was delighted to find that his mind worked with precision, rapidly. He took a distinct pleasure in the consciousness of his energy, and wondered vaguely how he could ever have been content to be so slothful as he had been for the past month or more. When he had collected the necessary data, he called for Miss Henderson to take dictation.

She came over to him, gave him a friendly nod and a "good morning" and sat down, ready for the persiflage which usually preceded the work they did together. The sight of her recalled the first intimation that had been given him of Pemberton's interest in Ruth. Now that, in his mind, the suspicion had been confirmed, he was strongly tempted to mention the subject in some way so that he might learn if Miss Henderson had anything to add to her previous information. But, in his new zeal for work, he put this temptation aside, and, almost brusquely, began his dictation. Miss Henderson wondered, but made no comment until he was compelled to pause in order to verify some data. Then she said:

"You're sure on the rush this A. M. What's the hurry? Going to catch a train?"

Ordinarily, neither the words nor the manner of easy familiarity would have annoyed him. But this morning they did, for they were definite evidence of the lightness with which he had considered the responsibilities of his position. He wished he had not made himself liable to

this sort of thing and that he might reprove her for her impertinence. But he could not. He saw only too clearly that it was he who was to blame for it, and not the girl, and to take her to task would but give her an opportunity to make him very uncomfortable. With these thoughts in his mind, he did not answer her, but went through the pages of his memorandum book, looking for the reference which he needed. Miss Henderson knew very well that he had heard her, and took his silence as evidence of ill humor.

"You're awful grouchy this morning. Did you get out of the wrong side of the bed?"

Hardwick smiled, as if in appreciation of the humor of her remark, but made no reply. He had now found the information which he wished, and said:

"Just make that three hundred and fifty instead of three hundred."

Miss Henderson saw that he was not willing to accept their ordinary relationship, and, wondering, set to work.

When all of the letters had been dictated, he called Ruth, and together they discussed the catalogue with a copy of it before them. It was a very ordinary affair, well printed, with good illustrations of the commonplace kind. As they went over it, principally for the purpose of arranging a programme for the compilation of the copy by the sales manager and his subordinates, an idea suddenly occurred to Hardwick.

"Say," he said, "do we have to get out this kind of a book?"

"What do you mean?" she asked, surprised. "Do you mean do we have to get out a catalogue?"

"Oh! I know we have to get out a catalogue of some sort. But are we compelled to put out a dull, unimaginative thing like this; just what everybody else does?"

"I don't think I understand."

"It's just this. The ordinary catalogue like this," he said, holding it up level with his shoulder, "is just a reference book which dealers consult when they need information. And usually, when they have done that, unless it's a most ordinary inquiry, they have to write to us to learn what they want to know. What I'd like to do is to put out a catalogue that would be actually interesting to anyone in the line, the sort of book that a dealer would have pleasure in reading. I'd like to bring out the essential facts and figures in some concise, well-ordered way that any child could understand. And then, I'd have real pictures of the goods, not these mechanically retouched affairs that look like nothing under Heaven, and I'd have information about them that the dealer would be glad to have, that would make him look at our book *first*. In other words, I'd like to make it a real 'silent salesman'." He was enthusiastic, he pictured mentally the book he would like to make, vaguely as to details, of course, and losing sight of the immense difficulty of the undertaking.

Ruth was infected by his enthusiasm.

"Oh! That would be splendid," she said and asked:

"Do you think we could do it?"

"Sure," he answered with conviction. "Just leave me for about fifteen minutes and I'll sketch out a sample page."

But it was fully an hour before he was ready for her. He had found the task much more difficult than he had thought, but the fine edge of his enthusiasm was not worn off thereby.

"Do you see?" he asked with pride, as she looked over the page. "There's the cut. Of course, I haven't attempted to show what I have in mind. I have a book in my desk here which has the sort of illustration I want. Wait a minute," and he went through one of the drawers of his desk and produced the thing he wished. He showed it to her. "That's the idea," he said.

"Cuts like that would be very expensive, wouldn't they?" she asked.

"Sure," he answered, "but they'd be cheap in the long run. They have imagination in them, they make the goods look like things that people really use. When a carpenter saw one of our braces in a picture like that, he'd never be content until he owned one. That's the purpose of a catalogue illustration, not merely to show an accurate diagram of details, although that's important too, but to make the person whom you're trying to interest *want* the thing he sees pictured."

Ruth was immensely impressed, both by the originality and excellence of the idea and by the recrudescence of the zeal which he had shown at the beginning.

"I think it's wonderful," she said, "but do you think we'll have time enough?"

"It'll mean a lot of work, of course, but I'll answer for that if Pemberton'll stand for the expense."

"I don't think you'll have any trouble in getting him to O. K. the increased cost if you can show him that you really can get the book out in time."

"I can do that all right. I wonder if I could see him now." And in his enthusiasm he grasped the telephone receiver and asked the operator to make the necessary inquiry. The answer came promptly to the effect that Mr. Pemberton would see him in fifteen minutes.

Hardwick used this time to make a rough estimate of the cost of producing the work and was surprised to find that the book he contemplated would cost about fifteen thousand dollars as against a cost of slightly less than eleven thousand for the previous issue.

Pemberton listened to his enthusiastic outline of the proposition with the utmost passivity. He allowed Hardwick to talk until he had completely finished. Then, after a silence of some seconds, he said:

"You have an excellent idea there, Hardwick. How much would it cost?"

"Not over fifteen thousand dollars. That's an outside figure. I may very well be able to get it down to about fourteen thousand. Don't you think it's worth the difference?"

"One thing at a time. I don't believe you could get

the book out for fifteen thousand. You'd better figure seventeen. Have you figured the extra postage?"

"I hadn't thought of that. That'd add five hundred dollars."

"More like a thousand," said Pemberton. "You'll want to use coated paper, and that means more weight."

"Ten pounds to the ream would do it."

"I don't think so. There's no use going to all this expense and then skimping the book for another ten pounds to the ream."

"You're right there," said Hardwick, delighted at Pemberton's display of interest. "But that would add both to the cost of the paper and the mailing too. And we'd have to use a heavier cover."

"We'll have to figure the cost at seventeen thousand at the least. I don't mind that. But there's one very important aspect of the matter which you seem to have overlooked."

"What's that?" asked Hardwick.

"You'll have to have an entirely new set of illustrations made. That's one thing and it's a big job. And the whole catalogue will have to be re-written from beginning to end. That will fall on you. I don't believe you can do it."

"Yes I can," answered Hardwick, with complete conviction.

"Have you figured out your time?"

"Yes," replied Hardwick. Actually he had not done

so except in the vaguest possible way. "This is Wednesday, the tenth of October. Say we begin on Monday next, that'll be the fifteenth. I can have practically everything in the printer's hands in six weeks, say the first of December. By making the arrangement in advance, we can get the printer to finish the work in four weeks; that would mean we'd have the books all in the mail before the tenth of January."

"That's all right as far as the printer goes, but you'll have to make it very plain to him that we're not going to accept excuses instead of catalogues. I'm afraid that the time is too short."

"I'll answer for that," replied Hardwick, confidently. "Johnny Albright could do it easy."

"I'll admit that it's possible, but I doubt very much whether you can do the preparatory work in six weeks."

"I can do it all right."

"That's the question. Can you do it right in that time? There's no use undertaking it at all unless it can be done right in every particular. You must be very sure of yourself before you undertake it."

"I've thought it all out," said Hardwick. But he had not done so. It was his incorrigible optimism which blinded him to the delays always incident to work of this kind.

"Well, if you are sure," said Pemberton, slowly, "I'll authorize you to go ahead. Think it over again and remember distinctly that by the fifteenth of January

every one of these catalogues must be in the mail. And the work must be done right. This book is worth while and I would be much pleased to have it, but we cannot afford to add six thousand dollars to our expense and then have a half-way job. And we cannot, under any consideration, get the book out later than January fifteenth. I hope I make that plain." He looked at Hardwick with the greatest seriousness.

"I can do it," said Hardwick.

"Well, think it over again and if on second consideration you are sure that you won't fall down, go ahead. But if you have the least doubt about it, you had better save it for another year."

"All right," replied Hardwick, delighted. This was his chance. This would show everybody the kind of material of which Henry Wallace Hardwick was made. He saw the book complete; he had in his mind the grudging praise which their competitors would be compelled to render; he had visions of increased salary, increased importance, success in the highest degree.

"It's a pity you didn't bring this to me sooner," said Pemberton. "How long have you had it in mind?"

"It came to me only this morning. I was going over the catalogue with Miss Bernstein, with the intention of practically duplicating last year's book, when it occurred to me that it wouldn't do, and then an idea came to me to put into practice this scheme which I tried to sell to one of my customers when I was in the

printing business. But the man couldn't see the expense, he hadn't the vision. I'll say the scheme's all right, even if it is my own idea." He ended in a burst of pride. Pemberton saw it and wondered whether this was merely a flash in the pan or was the expression of a personal force which had been dormant, awaiting only the suitable opportunity for its realization.

"Think it over," he said again, "and come to me tomorrow." The interview was at an end.

The more Hardwick thought about it, the better he liked the idea and the surer he became of his ability to complete the work in the necessary time. He came to Pemberton the next morning and assured him of his unshaken confidence and received definite authorization to go ahead.

At the meeting of executives on the following Monday, the plan was received with enthusiasm, and everyone concerned promised the most hearty co-operation.

CHAPTER XVII

BY Tuesday afternoon, Hardwick had completed the general outline of the new catalogue. He sent for one of the printers whom he was in the habit of employing for such jobs and arranged to have some dummies made. Two days later, the specifications for the printing were ready and were submitted to four printers who usually figured on the work of the Prescott Company.

In the meantime, he had begun the layouts for the pages and, by the end of the week, the general scheme was well in hand. Hardwick had been in consultation with several firms whom he considered capable of handling the drawings and engravings. He was much disappointed to learn that, owing to the shortage of employees occasioned by enlistment in the various branches of war service, there was a general disposition to ask for more time than he had thought would be necessary.

Finally, he was forced to the conclusion that he would be compelled to divide the work among several local firms and would probably have to call on some New York concern to help. This occasioned a trip to that city which wasted a whole day, when every hour counted. All of this arrangement consumed much time, none of which he had taken into account in his guess,

for it was no more, of the six weeks necessary for the preliminary work.

However, it was all arranged just before the first of November, and then he threw himself into the actual work, almost with fury. He found it much more difficult than he had imagined. It was perfectly easy to contemplate the variety, the constant interest with which he wished to invest every page by the avoidance of repetition, but actually to produce the effect which he desired was most difficult. Every page called for separate study and planning, and what he had figured in minutes proved to require hours. He was called on constantly to approve photographs, drawings, what not, while he was endeavoring to prepare new matter. At the end of the first week, when he should have had one-quarter of the one hundred and twenty-eight pages of the book in the engraver's hands, only seventeen had reached this stage.

And then the printers began to bother him. Following their usual custom, they held back the delivery of their estimates until the last minute, and used up as much time as possible in consulting him on all sorts of points, making various suggestions, ostensibly to render him service in the preparation of the work, but really to obtain information which would enable each of them to submit an acceptable bid. Hardwick tried to shunt them off on Ruth Bernstein, but invariably they came back to him and he was without the ability to deny himself.

He had always been easy of approach and every one of these men knew how to reach him.

In spite of the slowness of the work and the numerous, inevitable delays, Hardwick was not discouraged. The next day would always be prolific of great results; once the first difficulties over, the work would go swimmingly. The next week, with him, was always an endless period in which anything and everything might be accomplished.

One morning, about a week after the specifications had been given out, Hardwick received a visit from one William McCabe, a printer with a plant of fair size and a reputation for the production of mediocre work. Hardwick was displeased when McCabe's name was sent in, and resolved not to see him. He sent word that he was very busy and begged to be excused.

McCabe, however, was not to be easily dismissed. He stated his willingness to await Hardwick's convenience, if he could see him for one minute only. Hardwick yielded and came out into the reception room and greeted him, standing.

"How are you, Harry?" asked McCabe, offering his hand.

"Glad to see you, Mac," answered Hardwick. "I'm awfully rushed this morning. What can I do for you?"

"When can I see you for about half an hour?"

"Lord! I don't know when. I'm over my head with work and I haven't a minute."

"Can I see you at your house this evening?"

"Not very well, I'm working here this evening. I'm working every night."

"You eat, don't you?"

"Sure, but I just grab a bite of lunch and rush back to work."

"Where do you go to lunch?"

Hardwick saw there was no escape. "Come in," he said, leading the way to his desk. McCabe followed him.

"What can I do for you?" asked Hardwick when they were both seated.

"I want to bid on your catalogue."

"How did you hear about it?"

"Oh! I heard all right. How about it?"

"Nothing doing."

"Why not?"

"It's not in your line."

"Not in my line! Why not?"

"In the first place, it's too big a job for your outfit and, in the second, it's a little beyond you in quality."

"It's not too big a job for me, by a good deal. I can prove it, and as for quality, I can give you as much as anybody."

"See here, Mac," said Hardwick, who was becoming much annoyed, "I don't want you in on this. You don't belong. On other work, I don't mind, but this is out of your class."

"Oh! Is it?" asked McCabe, calmly, although he was quite conscious of Hardwick's feeling. "Well, I want to bid just the same. I don't have to talk about it right now, though. Meet me at lunch today, and let's talk this thing over. Will you?"

Hardwick hesitated for a moment and then accepted. There were good reasons for his humoring McCabe, whom he had known in a business way for many years.

By appointment, they met at a little restaurant in the neighborhood of the office. Over a simple lunch, they discussed various matters, the war, their common acquaintances, both of them sparring for time. The first matter of a business nature was begun by McCabe.

"Say, Harry," he said, "could you write a little copy for me in your spare time?"

"For you personally?"

"Not exactly. I've got a job from a concern who wants some advertising service to go along with their printing. They don't do enough to use an agency, and they look to us to work up the stuff for them. There's good money in it."

Hardwick was somewhat embarrassed. As usual, he needed money badly and would have been happy to earn it. At the same time, he knew very well McCabe's reasons for making the offer. Hardwick had had experience with him before. As a matter of fact, he owed McCabe (at least, that was the way he put it to himself to salve his conscience) four hundred dollars which he

had borrowed from him from time to time in the past. Not one cent of principal or interest had ever been repaid. McCabe did not expect it; in fact, his payment had been received in work which Hardwick had influenced in his direction, and Hardwick, had he been willing to look the facts squarely in the face, would have been compelled to admit that, except in name, these sums were bribes. But he did not look facts squarely in the face and now he was again wavering.

"I'm afraid I can't take on the work, Mac," he said, after a short pause.

"Why not?" asked McCabe.

"In the first place, I'm too busy. I've got my hands full with this catalogue. It's a big job."

"This work doesn't have to be done right away. I can give you some time on it."

Both men were fully cognizant of the real nature of the matter they were discussing, but sedulously avoided any mention of it. On the contrary, each of them spoke and acted as though they were both innocent of anything ulterior.

"I don't think it would be considered altogether proper," said Hardwick. "You know I'm on a salary."

"Sure I know. But this work wouldn't have to be in the company's time. You wouldn't be helping a competitor of theirs, it's a different line altogether, and besides, you wouldn't fall down on anything you'd be expected to do for them because you did this work for me."

"I know that," answered Hardwick, slowly, "but you want to bid on their work and it might be suspected that I was influenced in your favor because you gave me this job."

"In the first place this affair doesn't have to be made public property," said McCabe, with the air of imparting a great secret, "nobody but you and I need ever know about it, and besides, I'm not asking you to do it because I want a chance to bid on your work. That's all I want, a chance to bid. However, I'm asking you to do this job because of your ability. Your stuff's got a style that nobody in this town can touch."

"Well, I'll think it over and let you know."

"All right, take your time. There's no rush."

"Just the same, I'm much obliged to you, Mac."

"You're going to let me bid on this job, aren't you?"

Hardwick did not know how to persist in his refusal and consented. He told himself that he was not bound to consider the bid seriously. In fact, it was the easiest way to get rid of him. "I'll send you a set of specifications in the mail this evening," he said to McCabe, and called the waiter for the check. Hardwick scanned the check when it was brought and had already put his hand in his pocket to pay it when he noticed that one item had been omitted. He called the waiter's attention to it and asked that it be corrected. When the waiter had gone, McCabe said:

"I never bother about mistakes against the house.

That's their lookout. It's their business to see that they don't miss anything. If it's on me, that's a different matter."

Hardwick smiled, but made no reply.

After his return to the office, he directed Ruth to send the specifications to McCabe. She made no comment, although she wondered at it, as she was well aware of the mediocre quality of work turned out in the McCabe plant.

Hardwick was busy all afternoon on his layouts. It seemed, today, as though it were impossible for him to make any progress. One difficulty after another presented itself, and when by great exertion he had completed the preliminary layouts of four pages he found, to his dismay, that he had left out two items in the first of them which necessitated doing all of them over. He was strongly tempted to lay the work aside for the day and begin fresh the next morning, but he felt he could not do it, he was much too far behind his schedule. So he stuck at it, working under a sense of extreme pressure and turning out poor copy.

It was five-thirty when he was sure it could be no more than four o'clock. He looked with disappointment at the small result of his afternoon's work, laid it to one side, and read and signed his mail. When that was completed he went out to get a bite to eat and then returned to his desk.

He worked for nearly two hours, making somewhat

better progress, and at the end of that time he was so weary of the whole job that he wished he had never undertaken it. He felt he could do no more and went home.

When he came into his house it was after nine o'clock. Mrs. Hardwick was reading placidly, while Marian was going through the motion of preparing her lessons for the next day. The moment he came in, she dropped her books and ran to him with her usual alacrity. It was always the same, all of his weariness dropped from him in the warmth of her greeting. She clung to him, while he bent over and kissed his wife, who had not risen when he entered.

"Henry," she said, "I have rather unpleasant news for you."

"What is it?" he asked, rather weakly. It seemed that an evil fate was pursuing him even here, in his home, where he looked for rest and consolation.

"I have had a letter from Miss Strong, one of Alice's teachers, in which she tells me that our dear girl has not been well. She has had an attack of the grippe, and has been quite ill. Miss Strong wrote that she does not believe there is any occasion for concern and that she will keep us fully informed. I wrote her immediately, asking her if she thought my presence advisable and announcing my readiness to come at a moment's notice."

"You *wrote*," cried Hardwick. "Why didn't you telegraph or telephone?"

"It isn't necessary, I assure you. The tone of Miss Strong's letter was altogether reassuring and, besides, she said most distinctly that there was no occasion for concern. Further than that, I know Alice's constitution very well. She is unusually vigorous and has always come bravely through these little attacks. I am not at all worried and I think it very foolish of you to take the matter so seriously. If there is any occasion, I am quite sure that Miss Strong will let us hear from her without delay. She is a most discriminating young woman. She made an excellent impression upon me when I met her at the college, both as to her personality and attainments. She was much interested in my article on Rousseau, which she read in the University Magazine. She was quite lavish in her praise of it. Really, I have every confidence in her. Our child could not be in better hands." Mrs. Hardwick beamed upon her husband as though she wished to impart to him some of the sense of complete self-sufficiency which constantly sustained her.

But Hardwick was plainly worried. This was his first experience of the sort and it made him fearfully anxious. He had a sense of impending calamity which resulted in restlessness. He felt that he must do something.

"When was the letter dated?" he asked.

"Yesterday morning," answered his wife.

Hardwick looked at his watch. It was nine-thirty.

"I wonder if it is too late to call Miss Strong on the long distance 'phone," he said.

"Certainly it is," answered his wife. "It would take you at least one hour, and by that time it would be nearly eleven o'clock. I think you are giving yourself unnecessary concern. Miss Strong would be sure to telephone or telegraph us if there were cause."

Hardwick made no reply. He tried to convince himself that his fear was unreasonable; that there could be no ground for apprehension; that attacks of grippe were common, but to no avail. His unrest continued, he found it impossible to sit still and got up and walked about the room. Marian felt his trouble, and, sympathetically, wished that she might do something to alleviate it. He found that his nervousness was not allayed by motion. Instead, it seemed to increase, and presently he sat down again and made an attempt to read. But he could not fasten his attention, and, with the hope of sleep, sought his bed.

It seemed to him the next morning that he had not had ten minutes of consecutive slumber. He felt that he had spent most of the night awake and that the sleep he had had brought only disquieting dreams. In fact, he awoke frequently during the night, and in his waking spells every footfall he heard in the street seemed to him that of a messenger bringing unwelcome tidings. He made no attempt at consecutive thought, he did not try to apply reason to his trouble, he was simply panic-stricken, full of foreboding evil, deeply miserable.

He arose early, feeling more fatigued than when he

went to bed. He dressed hastily, found himself unable to eat his breakfast, and hurried to the office, where he immediately sent a telegram to Miss Strong, asking for news by return wire.

CHAPTER XVIII

HAVING sent the telegram, Hardwick felt somewhat better. At least he had done something, and the feeling of complete helplessness which had controlled him was slightly mitigated.

He was about half way through his mail when he was called on the telephone by Mrs. Hardwick. She told him, in a tone which he thought showed plainly that she was attempting to conceal her anxiety, that she had just received a telegram from Miss Strong advising her to come at once, as Alice's condition had suddenly grown serious.

"I'll go with you," said Hardwick immediately. "We'll go to New York on the ten o'clock train, if you can be ready in time, and we'll take the one o'clock from the Grand Central. That ought to bring us there about seven o'clock this evening. Can you make it?"

Mrs. Hardwick assured him that she could and said she would pack some things in her bag for him. Hardwick called Ruth and explained the situation to her. He told her that he expected to return the next evening on the night train, so that he would miss only two days. He would leave Mrs. Hardwick with Alice until she was completely restored to health. He gave her directions with regard to all matters which he thought might come up during the next two days and asked her to

explain to Mr. Pemberton the cause of his absence. He then left the office although it was no later than quarter after nine and he could reach the station easily in fifteen minutes.

Now that he was actually out of the office, and, as he felt, on his way to Alice, his hopefulness asserted itself in some measure. He told himself that it had been most absurd for him to yield completely to panic at the first sign of danger. Alice was a strong, active girl. She had every chance in the world, even though her illness might be more serious than they knew. There was no doubt that the health of the girls in the college was carefully watched by the authorities and that when they were ill they had the best medical attention and nursing.

But, even as he told himself these things, fear lurked in his bosom, and he railed at the distance that separated her from him; at the doubt that he must feel until he knew that she was safe beyond peradventure. Again, he gave himself up to sheer misery, to hopeless turning the matter over and over in his mind.

He arrived at the station ten minutes before Mrs. Hardwick appeared, and employed this time in purchasing railway tickets and parlor car seats. They met at a place in the station which they had appointed. He saw her coming through the crowd before she had perceived him, and he noted that her face wore an expression of anxiety that he did not remember ever having seen upon it before. As soon as she saw him

it vanished, and, in its stead, she wore her usual benevolent smile. He wondered vaguely whether she wore it intentionally, for, obviously, it was intentional, to help him, to encourage him. He could not decide, but, whatever the cause, he was grateful and admired her for her strength. She had no sooner come up to him than she began to talk.

"I'm quite sure, Henry," she said, "that Miss Strong is unnecessarily alarmed. I do not doubt that it is a more serious case than I thought, but I have every confidence that the issue will be favorable. Have you the tickets?"

He told her that he had attended to everything and led the way to the waiting room, as it was much too early for the gate for their train to be open. They sat down and Mrs. Hardwick began again with her assurances that the case, serious as it might be, would be bound to end as they wished. Hardwick took small note of what she said, he was much too depressed and anxious to be set at rest by her words. But as she continued, apparently without noticing his obvious lack of interested attention, he found himself wondering whether or not her endless flow of talk was no more than a mere nervous reflex, an outlet for her suppressed emotion. And, while this seemed a perfectly reasonable explanation, he could not deny the fact that she appeared to believe what she said and drew comfort therefrom. It reminded him of the faith of a Christian

Scientist, who, by dint of constant profession of belief in the non-existence of disease, came finally to a sort of immunity, more or less general, as the case might be. But these were not active thoughts in his mind; they came, as one might say, into a secondary stratum of his consciousness. He was only actively aware of them quite some time after he had begun to think of the subject, and when he was, he put the whole matter out of his mind, with a sort of horror at the idea that he could indulge in this sort of speculation when his child was lying ill, perhaps at the point of death, miles away from him.

And then the crier announced their train and they went out on the platform, and, in Hardwick's mind, walked endlessly until they reached the car in which their seats had been engaged. And then it seemed ages to him until the train started.

When it was finally in motion, he had a sudden sense of relief. At last they were on the way. Strange to say, Mrs. Hardwick had not spoken since they were on board; she sat, looking out of the car window, her face wearing its usual benignity, and Hardwick again found himself wondering at her and about her. Could it be possible that she did not share his anxiety? He knew well that Alice was her favorite of the two girls, that she invariably chose her to receive any special benefit when a choice had to be made between them, and yet, in the face of a call like this, which could be the result

only of fear of the most serious consequences, she was outwardly calm, and perfectly confident that she was beyond the reach of the shafts of ill fortune.

And then he remembered she had always been like this, always certain that the fates were powerless against her. Poverty, lack of opportunity, mediocrity could not touch her; they might ruffle her serenity for a moment, but always in the end they had no sting for her, they could not cause her more than a fleeting regret and then, apparently, they were forgotten.

Presently Mrs. Hardwick began again to talk to him. She suddenly remembered that this was her day at the Red Cross Auxiliary and she treated him to a long tale of the confusion that would surely result because of her absence. He listened with half of his attention, while the rest of it was devoted to a dull round of alternate fear and hope. But it was an eccentric round, the fear predominated.

At last they were in New York and went immediately to the Grand Central station, where they had their lunch. It would be more accurate to say that only Mrs. Hardwick had lunch, for it was impossible for him to do more than swallow a few mouthfuls. At all events, it occupied their time and he did not suffer the same misery of waiting for the train that he had experienced earlier in the day.

The motion of the train again relieved him even though it appeared that it was running exceedingly

slowly. He began to talk, for almost the first time on the trip, about Alice, offering conjectures as to her probable state. Mrs. Hardwick met this with a renewal of her assurances that, however serious the disease might appear, she was sure that Alice would get well. Hardwick listened to her with the devout wish that he could believe her. But he did not, it was impossible.

In the middle of the afternoon their train was held up for nearly an hour owing to some obstruction on the tracks. Hardwick could not keep his seat but went out of the train and walked up and down most of the time. When, at last, the train was again moving forward, it seemed to him that his limit of suffering had been reached. Never in his life had he been so unhappy. No longer did he face concrete facts, or even definite sorrow, but was conscious only of the deepest dejection, an utter let-down of his whole being such as he had never known.

Mrs. Hardwick too was showing signs of the strain, coupled with the physical fatigue of the long journey. She no longer talked, but sat in her chair, staring into vacancy.

At last they left the train and took one of the waiting cabs for the college. It was a trip of but a few minutes, and when they descended and began their walk into the building, it was with the utmost difficulty that Hardwick restrained his pace so as not to outdistance his wife.

As they entered the hall, he saw a young woman coming towards them; Mrs. Hardwick murmured "Miss Strong." It was not necessary, for he divined that it was she, and much more. There was no need for words, the look upon her face told him that the worst had happened; that they had arrived too late.

At that supreme moment Hardwick suddenly recovered control of himself. No longer was he beset by the gnawing fear which had consumed him for nearly twenty-four hours. That was gone, and, in its place, was the strength which came with the terrible certainty which he must meet. He turned to his wife and was shocked to see an ashen pallor on her face, a look of indecision, of doubt, of incredulity. He took her arm and led her to a chair.

"Oh! Henry," was all she said, and sat there, speechless, utterly crushed. This could not be; this could not come to her. She could not believe it. In her mind but one idea continuously recurred, this constant rejection of the definite fact. She sat there, dull, impassive, with this sing-song of denial sounding within her, and then, suddenly, as with a snap, the truth prevailed with a shock that appeared to halt her every function. Literally, she seemed to crumple, her head fell on her bosom, and her body looked as though it had shrunken.

She did not faint in the physical sense, but she was barely conscious; all of her faculties were numbed, she scarcely lived for those few minutes. Hardwick spoke

to her, whispering words of intended encouragement, but she did not hear. She hardly knew what had happened, the shock had been too great, and her whole nervous organization had been disordered, leaving her with only the elements of consciousness.

And then, gradually, little by little, order was re-established within her, and, with the recognition of what had happened, she was seized with a fury of protest, of violent revolt, of injustice, of injury. Inchoate as these emotions were within her, incapable as she was of the expression which would have relieved her, she suffered from them as though they burnt within her, as though she felt the pain of actual physical contact with fire, in horrible, helpless anguish.

For several minutes she sat thus; unhearing, unheeding the words which Miss Strong and her husband spoke to her from time to time, and then, suddenly, she looked up and said:

"Take me to her."

"Are you sure you are well enough?" asked Miss Strong.

"Take me to her," repeated Mrs. Hardwick, and arose, swaying slightly when she was on her feet. Hardwick took her arm, and together they went to the room where Alice lay.

On the way, Miss Strong explained that during the night Alice had developed an acute double pneumonia which had progressed at a frightful pace despite every

effort that had been made. She had died at half-past six in the evening. She had been attended during the afternoon by an eminent specialist from Boston, as well as two other physicians. No stone had been left unturned, nothing within the best medical knowledge had been left untried.

As Mrs. Hardwick looked upon her daughter's body, she suddenly collapsed and, this time, she really lost consciousness. A physician was called instantly and she was put to bed, where she speedily recovered her senses, and then under the influence of a powerful opiate fell into a deep slumber.

As soon as Hardwick saw that she was asleep, he went out for a walk. He felt that he must be utterly alone to appraise the situation, and he believed that a walk in the cool night would quiet his jaded nerves.

He was calm now; much depressed but not agitated. He felt his loss keenly; his love for both of his girls was complete, the best that was in him. Even though Marian was his favorite, Alice's place in his deepest affections had never been open to any question. And now, he thought bitterly, they must face the future without her. Ah! Well. Fortune had no favors for him. At every turn he was met by adversity and ill-luck, and now this crowning trial. Why was it? he mused. Why was he denied his share of happiness? Why must misfortune always be his portion? And then he thought of Marian, of her grief and consternation when the news should

come to her, and, instantly, his sympathy was entirely enlisted in her behalf, he forgot his own loss in the hope that he might be able to lessen hers.

He walked for about half an hour and then went to bed calmly and peacefully, though sorrowfully. At all events, he was a man and he must bear his trials with fortitude. He recognized that sorrow is part of the game and that when it comes, it must be met courageously and without whimpering.

It was in this frame of mind that he sought slumber and its peace was not long denied him.

CHAPTER XIX

THE funeral was set for the following Monday, four days after Alice's death. It was a comparatively expensive affair; some elementary quality in Mrs. Hardwick made it necessary for her to demand a certain amount of pomp and circumstance in this sad business to satisfy her feeling for what was fitting and proper. Hardwick had not offered any opposition. If he thought of the expense, which was unlikely in his state of complete dejection, it was but momentary. It did not seem to him that anything mattered very much just now, and he acquiesced in every proposal that was made with regard to the affair. He wondered dully how there could be room in his wife's mind for insistence upon such details in view of her sincere grief, for there was no chance for doubt as to that.

The first great shock and temporary display of helplessness once passed, Mrs. Hardwick's well-marked individuality reasserted itself. She talked freely, much too freely, Hardwick thought, of Alice, of her qualities, of her life from babyhood to the present. It seemed to Hardwick much too sacred for utterance, and, although he did not venture to incur the charge of hyper-sensitiveness which a mention of his views would have brought from his wife, he writhed under it. He did not object to her mention of these things to him, it was that she spoke

of them to everyone with whom they came into contact. And when they were again in their own home, they were almost constantly receiving visitors who came to offer their condolence.

Mrs. Hardwick saw everybody. It was not in her nature to hide her sorrow; she shared it with the world precisely as she shared all of her thoughts. Neither reticence nor circumspection moved her to silence, and it seemed to him that she had a distinct satisfaction in the presence of those of their friends who came to express their sympathy. While she spoke to them in a subdued tone, and reverted constantly to the subject of her great sorrow, there was no real diminution of her volubility. She still talked almost all of the time even if she spoke more slowly and more quietly.

She was interested in knowing the names of the senders of all of their cards of condolence, and collected them carefully. She personally accepted the offer of service, made by some of their friends, particularly with regard to the purchase of suitable mourning apparel. He wondered at her; it did not seem possible that she could have so much interest in such trifling matters when she was suffering from the greatest sorrow that she had ever known. But that she had the interest and that she was perfectly mistress of herself were unquestionable.

Among their visitors was McCabe, the printer. Before he left, he drew Hardwick to one side and asked him whether he was in need of ready money, with an offer

to lend him any sum which he might require. Hardwick thanked him but declined; he had just received his October salary and that was ample for immediate needs.

During the days between their return home and the funeral, Hardwick's principal concern was Marian. She had received the news quietly and without any marked display of emotion, but later, when he suddenly missed her and went in search, he found her in her room in a paroxysm of tears. He comforted her as best he could and, thereafter, she restrained the evidences of her emotion, and went about, silent, subdued, wearing an expression of the most intense grief. She was his great comfort, now as always. It seemed that she divined his moods and her presence invariably ministered to his need of the moment, whatever that might be.

Hardwick went to the office the morning after the funeral, very much worried about the time that had been lost in the preparation of the catalogue. It was the thirteenth of November, when at least half of the illustrations should have been well in hand, and only one-quarter of them had been begun. He attempted to plan the balance of the work, allowing himself an extra week, the first one of December, for the preparatory work. He felt that this would be safe, as the printer could begin with the earlier pages while the others were under way. He recognized that it would call for the greatest effort and that there was no room for mistakes of any kind.

When he reached the office, he called Ruth, and, with-

out waiting for any account of what had happened in the office during his absence, began immediately to discuss his plans for pushing the catalogue work to its conclusion. She told him that Pemberton had inquired as to the status of the project while Hardwick was away and that he was inclined to give up the idea of finishing it and, instead, favored duplicating their last year's catalogue.

"That won't do at all," said Hardwick, "I'll see him as soon as he comes in."

Pemberton greeted him as though nothing in particular had happened and Hardwick was so much interested in saving his catalogue that he did not notice it at the time. When it occurred to him afterwards, he was quite willing to admit that he never looked upon Pemberton as being altogether human. But this did not alter the fact that he felt hurt.

Pemberton listened to the explanation of his plan to make up for the lost time, and, after a short silence, said:

"I think it would be wiser not to take the chance of further delay. You know how I feel about being on time, and it seems to me that you are banking on everything going just as you plan it and your experience must have shown you that that never happens. Better give up the scheme now, while there's yet time to get out a book like last year's."

"But think of the money we've spent already and

remember that we've got the cuts for the first thirty pages practically completed. I'll work every night, if it's necessary, and I'll be ready next week with enough copy for the printer to begin with. I'll put it through all right."

"Very well," answered Pemberton, "but it seems to me you're going to have an awful pull."

"I'll come through all right," said Hardwick, and left the office.

He returned to his desk, where he found an accumulation of mail. Among it were several dunning letters, and a notice of an overdue premium on one of his life insurance policies. He was somewhat upset by these evidences of his constant lack of funds, but he was too much engrossed by the work on the catalogue to let it trouble him for more than a moment.

He plunged into the work with the energy of despair. During the morning he saw the men who were making the illustrations and was dismayed to learn that scarcely anything had been done in his absence. Instead of the thirty pages upon which he had counted, he found that barely twenty had been completed. The balance had been held up for various reasons, all of them depending upon his return. However, in his determination to get through in time, he mastered his disappointment and called upon the photographers and designers for extraordinary effort, telling them that his position depended on the prompt completion of this work. They promised

to do everything that lay in their power, and Hardwick was again encouraged.

During the balance of the week excellent progress was made and, when Hardwick was on his way home, very late on Saturday afternoon, he felt that he would pull through in time.

His work had so completely engaged his attention during the week that he scarcely had a moment in which to dwell upon his sorrow. He had worked every evening, and had come home at night so utterly fatigued that he had had only sufficient energy to tumble into bed. His great loss was in his mind constantly, of course, but the pressure of his business had prevented him from dwelling upon it.

But when he went home on Saturday afternoon the high pressure under which he had been working all week was relaxed, and, in the reaction, he felt broken, unhappy. What was it all worth? he asked himself, as he walked down the street. Always before, in the face of adversity, he had had the feeling that his trouble was but transitory; his wounds, whatever they might be, were on the surface only. But this was different, he felt that he had been hurt vitally; no longer was the citadel of his family intact, his loss was irreparable.

In the physical fatigue which he suffered, morbid thought had full play. He was ready to capitulate, to admit that he no longer had any hold on life that was worth while. Black despair seized him, and, for the

first time in his experience, he felt old, his force spent, the game no longer worth the candle.

It was in this mood that he opened the door of his house and let himself into the semi-darkness of the hall. And out of this half light there came the figure of Marian, who had been sitting there awaiting his coming. Her arms about his neck and her welcoming kisses worked a magical transformation. He was a man again, new strength came to him in the love which he bore this dear child. She was left to him, he thought, almost exultantly, and asked himself what manner of man he was to forget so easily the blessings that were yet his.

Together they went up the stair to Mrs. Hardwick. She was sitting in her bedroom knitting and, apparently, had been deep in thought. She greeted him in her usual manner, in which, however, the old cheerfulness was lacking. He sat down and questioned her as to the happenings of the day.

"We had quite a number of callers," she said. "It's beautiful the way my friends have come to me to express their sympathy. It is a most eloquent testimonial of their high regard, and, were it not for the sorrow which they come to share, it would be a source of the greatest pride to me. Mrs. L. Percival Sedley was among the callers. I was much honored; a woman, so occupied with the manifold duties which her high position in the community imposes, to find time to call on me, shows thereby not only her fine feeling, but her

right to the exalted station which she holds in society." Mrs. Hardwick, as usual, was being carried away on the wings of her own verbal fluency, and became progressively cheerful. In the same tone, she went on to speak of other matters of interest to her, interesting because, in her view, all of them tended to magnify her own importance.

Hardwick again wondered at her, his thoughts far from her actual words. He thought it remarkable that she could be so utterly self-centered that she should find personal satisfaction in visits of condolence. She was to be envied, he thought, in being thus able to maintain her interest in her own personality, no matter what happened. She had always been like this, always the same, everything was grist which came to her mill.

"Mrs. Sedley told me," Mrs. Hardwick continued, "that they miss me sadly at the Red Cross. It appears that things are not going very well without me. I really had no idea that my services were so important. Of course, I have always taken a great interest in the work; it has always been my habit to devote myself to any cause which aroused my enthusiasm, and, in this case, I have done the best I knew how, little thinking that my efforts were so thoroughly appreciated. Mrs. Sedley told me, among other things, that Mrs. Harley, the instructor, was quite distressed at my enforced absence and hoped that I would soon rejoin them, even though she recognized fully, under

the circumstances, that it would be a great sacrifice on my part. Really, I have almost decided to return in a week or so. I do not think that, at a time like this, we may allow our private sorrows to interfere with our usefulness to the public. With the whole civilized world at war, with our people, our government—”

“Mother,” interrupted Marian, who had been listening to this speech with great interest, “do you know what I think you could do wonderfully and make a lot of money, too?” She was perfectly serious and Mrs. Hardwick, who usually would not brook interruption, turned to her and, struck by the sincere earnestness of her tone and expression, asked:

“What, Marian?”

“You ought to be a lecturer. You say things so beautifully.”

Mrs. Hardwick was much pleased. There was no doubt of the sincerity of the compliment.

“I make no doubt, Marian,” she said, “that I could add substantially to the family exchequer were I to devote myself to public speaking. I have never thought of it before, but it is a matter well worth considering. Perhaps some day I shall have occasion to use what small gifts I have in that direction. At all events it is an interesting subject for thought.”

“You sure could put it across all right,” said Marian, and her mother was so much absorbed by the vision of herself in the public eye that she forgot to reprove her daughter for her verbal delinquency.

CHAPTER XX

ON the evening of that Saturday, Pemberton took Ruth to the theatre. He had frequently invited her to go with him to various places of amusement, but she had invariably declined. She had never been able to explain, even to herself, why she did not wish to accompany him in public, but she was very sure, nevertheless, that in the main she did not wish it. Her refusal was always definite, even though the emotion which prompted it was far from being so. That she was fond of him she could not conceal from herself; indeed, she did not wish to, but that her fondness for him was sufficient to make her willing to marry him she doubted greatly. Particularly when she was with him, did she feel the power he had over her; it seemed as though he had but to pipe for her to dance. And her very recognition of this power made her shrink from exposing herself to its influence.

She was a very proud girl, jealous of her independence. Something in her made her prize it far beyond her ability to justify it on any reasonable grounds. She simply wanted to retain it, and, as his wife, even as his fiancée, she felt that it would go from her. She was sure that, the die once cast, she would be utterly dependent upon him, that there would be loosened

within her emotions which she held to be not exactly ignoble, but perhaps unworthy.

It was in this spirit that she had at first repelled his advances, and, when he pressed them notwithstanding, that she had pleaded for time and had finally made him accept the delay of one year in which she was to make up her mind. Since that agreement had been made he visited her at irregular intervals; irregular because she frequently refused to allow him to come when he proposed it. She felt that she could not hold to her determination if he pressed her too often. And he continued to be an ardent suitor; even when he held to the letter of their agreement, his mere presence was an active advocate of his cause, his words adding but little force to the mute appeal of his personality.

Perhaps Ruth shrank from appearing with him in public because she felt that, in doing so, she was taking the chance of publishing an attachment which she was most desirous of concealing, certainly until she had reached a definite conclusion. She would have been compelled to admit that this was rather a silly idea, had she been put to the test, but, since she never mentioned it, she was not called upon to defend it. She had only consented this time because, literally, she had run out of excuses.

Pemberton followed her down the aisle of the auditorium with pride. To him, she was the most beautiful woman in the world, and he felt that she must be so

to everyone who had eyes to see. He was not an observant man, particularly with regard to details of women's dress, and, had he looked away from her, he would have been unable to remember a single detail of her attire. All he knew of it was that it set off and accentuated her great beauty. In fact, she was dressed very well, although very simply, and she was really a very good looking girl, much above the average.

All through the performance he was so conscious of her presence at his side that it was with difficulty that he maintained his interest in the play. He was not much given to going to the theatre; he could never get over its unreality and the stronger the bid it made for emotion, the colder it left him.

Not so his companion. She yielded herself with abandon to the play. She did not analyze, she did not question so long as the probabilities were not too greatly disregarded and the acting was passable. Several times he turned to look at her and was amused and pleased by her deep absorption in what was going on upon the stage. And as, from time to time, he looked at her, totally unconscious of his glance, he wondered what it was that made him desire her so ardently. Why was it held for her to be the one woman who had ever been able to dominate his thought. He could find many virtues in her, much that was admirable and praiseworthy, but he knew that there must be many other girls who were similarly gifted, perhaps even more

generously endowed than she, and he knew that the reason was not here.

It was subtler than that because he knew that he had not chosen her. His desire for her had imposed itself upon him so thoroughly, so completely that he was sure that it would persist in the face of any discouragement. He was confident, were they ever to marry, that he must find in her, in the intimacy of conjugal life, traits and ideas that would not please him, some, even, that might displease him; but still he would want her, would always want her. Perhaps it was even the admixture of these elements that made her so utterly charming to him.

Between the acts, he listened to her remarks about the play and the actors with the greatest pleasure. He marvelled at the keenness of her criticism, at the accuracy of her appreciation, even though her standards were so far removed from his. She spoke modestly but with conviction, and, as he listened, he found himself envying the freshness, the unspoiled ingenuousness of her attitude.

After the theatre, he took her to a fashionable restaurant for supper. He had not mentioned the matter to her; he simply took her acquiescence for granted. She went with him without taking thought and it was only when they had actually entered the restaurant that it occurred to her that she was being led by him without question, by the force of his dominating personality,

and it piqued her although she gave no sign of it. It would always be like this, she thought; she would always be subject to him, dependent upon him for her every course of action without question, without protest. And he would wield his sway over her without effort, without even conscious determination.

But these were but transitory thoughts and she gave herself up to the pleasure of the adventure, for to Ruth, despite her twenty-five years, this whole evening's experience was an adventure. She had gone to the theatre with men before this and had been entertained by them at supper, but never had there been present any element which engaged her affections. With one exception, none of her former escorts had ever had any opportunity to make known to her any aspiration he might have had to hold a position in her regard. The exception was Horace Gerson, who had let it be seen very clearly that the smallest encouragement would bring him suppliant to her feet. But he bored Ruth beyond measure, she accepted a moderate amount of his attention only because her mother was continually making opportunities for him. At that, Ruth barely treated him civilly, but he persisted nevertheless.

Pemberton amused her greatly by his remarks about the people they saw around them. His sense of humor was of a very special kind; it manifested itself in caustic, rather sardonic comment on the weaknesses of his fellow men. His smile was peculiar, it seemed rather wry to

Ruth, even as she laughed at his trenchant observations. Suddenly she remembered that she had never really heard him laugh openly, freely, as most men do. His laugh always seemed to be a concession, a conscious action undertaken with purpose.

But even while she remembered this, she gave herself up completely to his mood and entered into the spirit of his shrewd comment. How keen he was, she thought, how superior to the majority of men who filled the restaurant, many of them undoubtedly idlers, with no serious purpose in life.

A trio of army officers entered the restaurant and seated themselves at a table near them. They were splendid looking young fellows, in the pink of condition, wearing their simple uniforms with grace and distinction. Ruth found them very attractive and called Pemberton's attention to them.

"Don't you think they're fine-looking boys?" she asked.

Pemberton turned and looked at them fixedly for a moment.

"Yes, they are," he said. "And they've got the right kind of clothes on, too."

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"I mean that every able-bodied man, who can possibly do it, should be in uniform. We've got a big job on hand in this war and the only way to put it through is to get at it, and get at it right. I feel like a slacker myself."

"But not everybody can go," said Ruth in dismay. The thought of his going away caused her pain, a pain so sudden, so unexpected that she was not conscious that she had shown her feeling. Indeed, she had not herself known until that moment just how much her sense of security was based on the knowledge that he was at hand when wanted.

"Of course not," he answered. "Not everybody can go and fight, but actual fighting's only one part of the game. For every actual fighting man there must be about a dozen doing other things. You know a soldier has to eat, travel, wear clothes, carry arms, use ammunition. And behind all of these things there has to be organization: Clerks, typewriters, bookkeepers, advertising. It's just a big business after all and the only trouble is that you don't really have time to build up your organization, everything's wanted at once. And then there's politics in it. Unfit men get in the way of capable ones and gum the game. And tradition, and everything that causes delay and waste. Oh! it makes me mad to think about it."

Ruth looked at him in admiring wonder. Never had she seen him more earnest, more animated. After a short pause, she said to him:

"I didn't imagine you felt so strongly about it as that."

"It's funny, isn't it?" he answered.

"Funny! how?" she queried.

"You know," he said, seriously. "If you think it out calmly and dispassionately, you can't find any real reason for what people call patriotism. I hate the word."

Ruth interrupted. "Who was it that said that 'Patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel'?" she asked.

"I don't know. I never heard it before, but it says exactly what I was thinking about. You hear a lot of white-livered crooks talking about patriotism, and love of country and all that, and you wonder whether they're hypocrites or just stupid asses. I've thought about it a lot, and I can't see why my country should be better than any other just because I happened to be born in it. And that, when it's all boiled down, is about what it amounts to. If this is a better country than any other, there's no particular credit to me for having been born in it, I didn't have anything to do with it. I suppose the Germans feel the same way as other people and I don't blame them. But here's what gets me: I know there's no real reason for loving your country and wanting to do your part when there's trouble, but the fact is that I do—and I want to take my part, too."

Ruth's eyes glistened as she said, "I think it's fine of you to feel that way. But don't you think that what you're doing is important; don't you think that some people have to keep things moving while the others do the fighting, so that the business of the country doesn't stop?"

"Of course," he answered. "Some things, necessary

to the war, must be kept going. But they don't have to be pushed as they would be in ordinary times. Our concern could get along without me and I could help in some real war work. I've been thinking that—"

But Ruth interrupted him again. "No one could run our business as well as you do and you know it."

"No, I don't," he answered and then paused, his attention having suddenly been attracted by the entrance of a man and woman who took seats near them. "Do you see that man that just sat down," he said in a low tone.

Ruth followed his glance. "Yes," she said.

"That's William Cartwright, the big shipbuilder." And he began to talk about him, telling her of big deals that Cartwright had undertaken. After that, their talk went to other subjects which occupied them until they left the restaurant.

In the cab, on the way home, they were silent for a while, but presently Ruth said:

"I've had a lovely time this evening. I'm awfully glad I came."

Pemberton was delighted. Her tone, more than her words, gave him the feeling that he had come nearer to her tonight than ever before.

"I've enjoyed it, too," he answered, simply. "I—" but the words would not come. For once, he was at a loss, and, instinctively, his hand sought hers, and, having gained it, he was transported by a gentle return of the pressure with which he grasped it.

"Ruth," he said, his voice husky with emotion, "you do want me, don't you?"

"Oh! Fred," she said, "don't ask me now, please." She tried to withdraw her hand, but he held it firmly for a moment. Then he released it, and, putting his arm around her neck, drew her face to his. She scarcely resisted, and, as he kissed her, all of her resistance vanished and she returned his caress with an ardor which took him by storm.

"Oh! Ruth," was all he said.

But she, feeling the imminence of defeat, regained control of herself by a great effort, and drew away from him. She was dismayed, frightened, angry with herself. She knew that she wanted him, that her body cried for him, but she had felt this all along. This was the very thing which she had dreaded; this would make her his slave. She feared her own passion, and summoning every bit of resolution of which she was capable, crushing within her the imperious call of her blood, she said, as coldly as she could:

"You're not fair. You're not true to your promise. I'll never go out with you again." She looked out of the cab window, away from him.

Pemberton was amazed beyond the power of expression and sat there moodily. He had not acted with intention, he had simply been carried away. And as he gradually became calmer, he tried to tell himself that he had not acted well, but there was no conviction in it.

He did not speak for several minutes and then only when he had decided upon the course which he believed would most likely repair the damage to her feelings.

"Please forgive me, Ruth," he said contritely. "I really didn't know what I was doing, I was simply carried away. It won't happen again."

"How do I know?" she asked with a touch of disdain. "How do I know you won't be 'carried away' again? I guess the best plan would be not to expose you to the temptation." She managed to affect a scorn which she surely did not feel. Oh! if she only could be like other girls, she thought, and give herself to this man whom she wanted above all others.

"Please, Ruth," he said, and there was no doubt of his contrition. "Don't talk like that. I'm awfully sorry."

But she was obdurate and would not answer. His contrition went and he was angry.

"Well, if you won't take my word," he said, "I'll see that there's no occasion for further temptation. I've been wanting to go into the service for several months, and the only thing that kept me out of it was you; I didn't want to go away from you. But now, my mind's made up, I'll take steps at once."

There was no doubting that he meant every word, and Ruth, who now knew that above everything else she did not want him to leave, turned to him again and laid her hand on his arm.

"Fred," she said, cajolingly, "will you really promise

not to do such a thing again until—until I've finally made up my mind?"

"What's the use?" he asked quietly, but within him he triumphed.

"Will you promise?" she asked, her hand still on his arm.

"Yes," he answered.

"And will you stay here, and not enlist?" she asked coaxingly.

He looked at her, but her head was down, he could not see her face in the half light.

"Yes," he said again.

For the rest of the ride, but a few minutes, they were silent, but her hand still rested on his arm.

CHAPTER XXI

ON the following Monday afternoon, McCabe called on Hardwick. The latter had had a bad day, due principally to the receipt of a bill from the undertaker, which seemed enormous. The trip to the college and sundry other expenses which had to be paid in cash had left Hardwick without money at a time when he needed a considerable amount to pay pressing bills. His overdue insurance premium was still unpaid and, unless he acted on this immediately, his policy would lapse. Naturally, he had been borrowing the reserve as fast as it accumulated, using the loans to pay new premiums, so that there was no negotiable equity in it. He must have money; he must get it somewhere, somehow. All day long this idea had been in his mind, upsetting him, making him restless and incapable of concentrating his mind on his work.

The strenuous effort he had put on the catalogue during the preceding week had had the effect of forwarding that work considerably, and, had he been untroubled otherwise, he would have felt hopeful about the successful completion of the book within the stipulated time. But his mood made every prospect dark, and to-day he was sorry that he had ever undertaken the work. He was sure it would be a colossal failure in its every aspect; the work still to be done

upon it seemed enormous, beyond the capability of anyone living to complete within the required time.

Two of the printers had finally submitted their bids for the work and the others had promised to have them in during the day. The two that had been received were largely in excess of the greatest estimate which he had made and this was another thorn in his side. Unfortunately these bids came from the printers whose prices usually ran low. It looked very much as though he would be compelled to go to Pemberton and tell him that they would have to add at least another thousand dollars to their catalogue appropriation. This came at an unfavorable moment because Pemberton had given orders, within the last few days, to restrict their expenditures for advertising to the lowest possible limit, in conformity with the wish of the War Industries Board.

When McCabe's name was sent in to him, Hardwick's first impulse was to deny himself to him on the plea of being too busy, but he reflected that this would but postpone the inevitable and he consented to see him.

McCabe had come to talk about the catalogue. After the necessary preliminaries, he asked:

"How would you like to save about eight hundred dollars on this job?"

"How?" queried Hardwick, suspicious at once.

"You've specified Snowdrift Enamel for the book, haven't you?"

"Sure," answered Hardwick, "go on."

"Well, you know what the price of it is, don't you?"

"Twelve cents."

"That's right. Snowdrift is a good paper, I've got nothing to say against it, but it's no better than a number of others. Just because it's well known they charge a big price for it, and they're as independent as hogs on ice. No matter what you do, you can't budge the price, big lot or little lot. If it's over a ton and less than a carload, you've got to pay twelve cents." McCabe paused and glanced at Hardwick. He was one of those men who habitually look everywhere except at the person to whom they happen to be speaking. It was only at intervals that McCabe looked one straight in the eye, and then his roving glance rested for only a moment.

"Well?" asked Hardwick.

"Well," repeated McCabe, "I've got the refusal of a fine lot of paper for your book, every bit as good as Snowdrift and, if anything, a little better, and I'm in a position to save you eight hundred dollars on that item. What do you think of that?" He looked at Hardwick triumphantly.

But Hardwick was not moved to any appreciable extent.

"What paper is it?" he asked, coldly.

"What's the difference?" asked McCabe, rather uneasily. "If I guarantee the result on it, isn't that enough?"

"No," answered Hardwick. "If I opened up that specification and let every printer bid on the cheapest paper he thought would pass, I guess I could save more than a thousand dollars."

"The hell you could," answered McCabe defiantly. "You know damned well that the cheapest thing on the market that would answer the purpose wouldn't save you more than four hundred. You wouldn't consider Excelsior, would you?"

"I should say not," answered Hardwick emphatically. "That's rotten truck."

"Sure it is," McCabe confirmed, again confident. "What I've got is something special, I can't let you know whose paper it is, I promised, but here's a sample. What do you think of it?" He took a long envelope from his inside pocket and extracted a folded piece of glossy coated paper. He handed it to Hardwick, who examined it carefully.

"It looks pretty good," commented Hardwick grudgingly, and then was silent. McCabe saw that it was his cue to await some further word from the other and also remained silent. When, after a short pause, Hardwick spoke, McCabe was much surprised.

"Say, Mac," he said in a friendly tone, quite different from the grudging air which had marked his concession of the apparently acceptable quality of McCabe's sample, "did you ever do anything about that advertising copy you wanted me to write for you?" Hardwick's

voice was very low, his manner confidential. McCabe was delighted, but his manner in replying gave no indication of his inward emotion.

"Why, no," he said, "I've brought the stuff with me. I wanted to talk to you about it."

"I've been thinking over the matter," said Hardwick, slowly, endeavoring to affect an off-hand manner which would hide his uneasy conscience, "and I think I can handle it for you next Sunday and, if there's time enough, every Sunday until the work is finished."

"There's no great hurry. If you could give me the first part of it next Monday, I could let you have four or five weeks to finish it. Do you want to see it now?"

"No," answered Hardwick hastily. "There's no use publishing the affair, is there?"

"Certainly not," assented the other. "When can I see you about it?"

"Meet me at O'Neill's at five-thirty. I'll buy you a drink."

"You're on," said McCabe, with a smile.

"This coated looks pretty good," said Hardwick. "Is this a sample of the actual lot?"

"Yes, it's almost the exact size we want. We're in great luck to run into it." He spoke as though the order had actually been placed with him. Hardwick noted it and was moved to call his attention to the fact that it wasn't at all likely that McCabe would succeed in getting the business, but he could not bring himself

to talk about it now. There was plenty of time for that, he told himself.

"Say, Mac," he said instead, "you'll have to get your bid in if you want it considered. They'll all be in to-day and I expect the job will be let to-morrow."

"Will the first thing to-morrow morning do?"

"I ought to have it to-day, but if you'll promise to have it here to-morrow morning before ten, I'll wait for you. But no longer."

"All right. Have you all your bids?"

"All but two, and they're promised for this afternoon sure."

Just then the telephone rang, and Hardwick answered.

"Tell him I'll see him in a minute," he said, and, hanging up the receiver, turned to McCabe.

"That's Johnny Albright with his now."

"I'll be going," said McCabe, rising. "See you at O'Neill's at five-thirty."

"All right. So long," answered Hardwick and his visitor departed.

Over their drink, which they took in an alcove which screened them from general observation, McCabe went over the details of the matter which he wished Hardwick to work up for him. When he had finished, the latter said:

"There's nothing very hard about that. I thought it would be more of a job." He was disappointed. This could not be worth more than a hundred dollars at the

most, and he felt that three hundred was the smallest amount that would help him out of his present difficulty.

"This is only the beginning," said McCabe, who had divined Hardwick's disappointment. "There'll be a lot more."

"Oh!" said Hardwick, relieved, and was silent. He was wondering whether he might ask for an advance payment. But McCabe anticipated him.

"Would you like something on account?" he asked.

"I could use a little money right now," said Hardwick, as though it had just occurred to him.

"How much would you like?"

Hardwick wished he could ask for five hundred dollars but did not dare. Necessity, however, compelled him to make it three hundred, although he felt that it was out of all proportion to the value of the work now in hand.

"Three hundred," repeated McCabe. "That'll be all right." He was surprised at the amount, but pleased as well. He knew that he could get it all back indirectly. "I haven't that much on me now," he continued, "will to-morrow do?"

"Sure," answered Hardwick. He was becoming exceedingly uncomfortable, although he told himself that this was a perfectly legitimate transaction. "Take lunch with me to-morrow at Hunter's. I'll meet you at twelve-thirty."

"All right. Twelve-thirty."

A short silence ensued.

"Did you get all of your bids in?" asked McCabe.

"Yes, the last one came just before I left the office."

"How do they run, pretty high?"

"I should say so, much higher than I expected. You're going to let me have yours by ten to-morrow at the latest, aren't you?"

"Sure, I've got it all figured out. I only want to go over it for safety."

"How much is it?" asked Hardwick. He hoped it would be so high that it would be out of the question to consider it. It would be very satisfactory to be able to go to McCabe and tell him that he had done everything he could to have the order go to him, but his price made it impossible. As matters now stood between them, he did not see how he could fail to consider his bid seriously if it were low enough.

McCabe had made up his mind to have this order. There was no good reason why he should have been so bent upon it, in fact, he would have had difficulty in explaining his great desire for it, but, nevertheless, the desire and the determination were there. He had estimated the job as worth about ninety-five hundred dollars, although he would have been quite willing to accept the order at nine thousand, reckoning upon adding a sufficient amount of extras to cover this difference and any advance he might make to Hardwick ostensibly to pay for the writing of advertising copy which he had

ordered from him. At the same time, he did not wish to accept the order at ninety-five if there was a possibility of getting more. McCabe was strictly an opportunist; he sold his printing for what he could get for it, taking orders sometimes at ridiculously low prices compared to those of his competitors. But, in the long run, he did very well. He had no scruples to prevent him from making any possible substitution of materials, or any reduction in the quality and amount of labor. Printing is bought in the main by people who do not understand it, and the opportunity for practices such as have just been described is very great. In spite of this fact, very few printers choose this dubious road to wealth if, in fact, any printer ever chooses any road to wealth. It is a notoriously poor business from the standpoint of profit.

When Hardwick asked McCabe what his price was, the latter answered promptly:

"It comes to about thirteen thousand dollars."

His ruse was entirely successful.

"Thirteen thousand dollars!" repeated Hardwick in great surprise. "You must have made a mistake in your figures."

"I don't think so," answered McCabe, seriously. "I've gone over it very carefully."

"You must have made a buck somewhere. You're nearly three thousand dollars high."

"I can't see it," said McCabe slowly. "I made that estimate myself and I went over every item twice. I'm

sure there's no error in it. Maybe your low man made the mistake. Aren't your other bids about the same as mine?"

"No," said Hardwick. "Of course I can't tell you the bids, but there isn't five hundred dollars between the highest and lowest." As the bids ran from ten thousand two hundred to ten thousand six hundred, he was well within the truth.

McCabe now had the facts he wanted. He suspected that it would be necessary for him to quote a price well under the others, as he knew that his reputation with the Prescott Company was not very good. He had done some work for them over a year ago and had had considerable trouble in collecting his bill for extras. He decided to quote nine thousand and two hundred, but said as he got up to go:

"Well, Harry, I'll go over the figures again to-morrow morning before I send them in and make sure that I haven't made any mistakes. I can't see how I could have made any, I certainly was very careful."

CHAPTER XXII

MCCABE was as good as his promise and presented his bid for the printing of the catalogue at ten o'clock the next morning. Hardwick was surprised, when he read it, to find that the price quoted was ninety-two hundred dollars. He looked questioningly at McCabe, who sat beside his desk, smiling.

"You're wondering at the difference, aren't you?" said McCabe.

Hardwick still looked at him questioningly, so he continued:

"The silliest mistakes you ever saw. Two of them, one in addition and the other in multiplication. It's a good thing none of my clerks made that estimate. He'd be without a job. That's all I've got to say."

Hardwick's suspicions were aroused. Just what was McCabe driving at? he wondered; but none of his suspicion showed in the tone in which he said:

"Well, Mac, much obliged. I'll let you know how it comes out."

"All right," answered McCabe, and left. He did not think it necessary to go into any argument on the subject. He was willing to await their interview at Hunter's at twelve-thirty.

After he had gone, Hardwick called Ruth and

handed her McCabe's proposal. She read through it quickly, looking for the price. When she found it, she read it out loud:

"Ninety-two hundred dollars. That's a very low price compared to the others."

"Yes," assented Hardwick. "Just how do the others run?"

"I'll get them," she answered, and went to her desk. She was back in a moment and read them off to him.

"Ten thousand six hundred, ten thousand four hundred and fifty, ten thousand two hundred and fifty and ten thousand two hundred. He's a whole thousand dollars under the lowest."

"Looks like his order," said Hardwick. He made an effort to appear nonchalant, but he was really much excited.

"I don't think we can afford to do business with Mr. McCabe," said Ruth quietly.

"Why not?" he asked.

"He doesn't stand very well in this establishment. We had a rather disagreeable experience with him on the last job he did for us."

"What was that?" he asked. "Won't you sit down?" he continued as he saw their interview promised to be longer than he had expected. She did so, still holding all of the bids in her hand.

"I don't remember the exact figures," she said, "but Mr. McCabe quoted a low price on a job to us and we

gave him the order. When his bill came in, he overcharged us frightfully for a lot of extras, and, by the time we settled the matter, his price was actually more than the highest bid we had received in the first place."

"Extras," said Hardwick, "what kind of extras?"

"Oh! all kinds. Alterations and changes, lots of them. There was an over-run too, on which he charged the full rate. I don't remember the exact details, but I know that Mr. McNair said he would never give him another order. The work wasn't very well done, either."

She paused and looked at Hardwick. He was in a quandary. He was well acquainted with McCabe's tactics, having had considerable experience with him in the past. He knew that McCabe's price was lower because of the substitution of paper. It was fairly clear to him that the order should go to one of the other bidders; the slight variation between the higher bids permitted the choice of any one of them. But he remembered that he was to meet McCabe at noon and that he was to receive the advance of three hundred dollars for the work he was to do for him. Oh! If only he were able to get along without that money. He wondered whether McCabe would advance it even though his bid were not accepted. He sat silent, tapping rhythmically on his desk with the end of his pencil. Ruth also was silent, and, as he did not speak, she began to re-read McCabe's proposal, this time carefully.

"Did you notice this?" she said suddenly, looking up.

"What?" asked Hardwick.

"It says: 'To be printed on Snowdrift Enamel or paper of equal quality.' That won't do, will it?"

"Scarcely," answered Hardwick, "unless, of course, we were shown that the other paper was equal in every respect."

"I wouldn't trust Mr. McCabe to make any substitution of something equally as good if he wasn't watched."

"You seem to have it in for McCabe," said Hardwick, smiling.

"No, I haven't. Not personally, of course. I'm only judging from our experience with him."

"Well, if McCabe gets this order, and it looks as though he ought to have it, I'll guarantee that there won't be any substitution of inferior material, and that there won't be any extras. You know I've been in the printing business myself and I'm on to all of the tricks of the trade."

"Don't you think," asked Ruth, "that we ought to give the other bidders a chance to quote the same way?"

"If there was more time, yes," answered Hardwick, "but we haven't a moment to lose. I can't afford to put another minute in on this thing. I'll send for McCabe this afternoon and put it squarely up to him. I'll insist on his paying a big penalty for delay. I'll make him submit every form before he prints it. I can handle him all right and I want to save that thousand."

"Very well," said Ruth. She felt that Hardwick had made up his mind and that further protest would be not only useless, but quite outside of her authority.

McCabe was awaiting Hardwick at the restaurant when the latter entered promptly at the appointed time. They sat down together and went through the form of general conversation for a while, each curiously under the necessity of masking his real interest, the one in the prospective advance and the other in the order he wanted.

When the general conversation had persisted sufficiently to satisfy their consciences in this respect, McCabe asked:

"Did you come to any decision about the catalogue?"

"Not altogether, but it looks like your order."

McCabe thrilled with triumph. "That's good news," he said.

"Come over this afternoon about four o'clock and I'll talk it over with you."

"All right," said McCabe. "By the way," he went on, "I've brought the three hundred." He drew a long envelope from his inside pocket and passed it to Hardwick, who put it in his own pocket without examination.

"Do you want a receipt?" he asked.

"Certainly not, Harry. If I couldn't trust you, I'd give up."

In spite of the obviousness of this remark, Hardwick could not help feeling flattered. He told himself that

McCabe wasn't a bad fellow after all, and he would certainly get the worth of his money in the quality of the copy he would receive. This was on the surface of his mind, but within, the unethical quality of the transaction persisted in making itself felt. Not strongly, however, and as Hardwick dwelt upon the excellence of the work he would do for McCabe, it grew weaker and weaker, but did not altogether disappear.

They hurried through their lunch after this and then Hardwick went to his bank on the way back to the office and deposited the money which he had received. At the office he made out checks for some of the most pressing of his obligations, after which he put the matter out of his mind and busied himself on the catalogue. He made fine progress, and, when McCabe arrived, promptly at four o'clock, he was in an excellent humor.

McCabe agreed willingly to every condition which Hardwick put upon him and at five o'clock departed with the signed order. His last words were:

"Well, Harry, all I've got to say is that I'll give you a job you'll be proud of."

Hardwick now felt entirely justified in his action. His natural optimism asserted itself; all difficulties vanished and he saw the triumph that would be his when the book appeared. It all looked so easy to him to-day that he decided to go home to dinner. His original intention had been to spend the evening at the office.

He called his house on the telephone and recognized Marian's voice.

"Is mother home?" he asked.

"No, she's been out all day."

"Well, when she comes in, tell her I've changed my mind about working to-night, and I'm coming home to dinner. Tell her it doesn't make any difference what I get, anything will do."

He arrived home before Mrs. Hardwick. She came in at seven o'clock, her usual benignity greatly emphasized. She was dressed in complete mourning, a new gown which already showed distinct signs of its owner's inattention. It was a ready-made affair which, though expensive, did not look so, for it did not fit, and contrary to the usual effect of black dresses, it accentuated rather than suppressed the magnitude of the proportions of its wearer.

"Why, Henry, my dear," she said, effusively, "this is a most agreeable surprise. I'm very glad, for I really have some very important news for you."

Hardwick's good humor had vanished when he entered his home. It brought his grief to the fore. In the important business of the day, it had been forced out of his mind. He had been cheered somewhat by his talk with Marian while they were awaiting Mrs. Hardwick, but, to-day, Marian herself seemed in lower spirits than usual, and her evidence of affection for him, always manifest, lacked its usual liveliness, while Mrs.

Hardwick's obvious self-satisfaction distinctly irritated him.

They ate their dinner, a wretched affair because of the execrable cookery, to the accompaniment of Mrs. Hardwick's voice. She talked almost unceasingly.

"This morning," she began, "Marian's remark of the other evening came into my mind. 'Why not,' I asked myself, 'put such talent as I may possess in the direction of clear expression to account?' The longer I thought of the matter, the more interested I became. Finally, I decided to discuss the matter with Mrs. Hutchinson and called her on the telephone. She asked me to come over to her house at once and agreed to send her car for me. I went over as soon as I was dressed and we had a long talk on the subject. I remained at her house for luncheon.

"After luncheon we continued our talk, discussing various phases of the subject. At last, an idea came to me which Mrs. Hutchinson pronounced as really brilliant when I communicated it to her. It was no more than the proposal to deliver a series of talks on current topics. As we went over the matter, we became more and more interested, and, finally, we decided that it was exactly the thing to do. We agreed that there was a large public which would welcome and support such an effort and that, particularly now, with the whole world at war, with difficult questions of all kinds confronting the ablest statesmen, this public would be

happy to have the opportunity to have the true inwardness of the world's happenings explained to them. Mrs. Hutchinson said she knew of no one more capable in this respect than myself and, without undue vanity, I believe I am rather well qualified. We at once set about the execution of the project and—"

"You don't mean to say," cried Hardwick, amazed and mortified as well, "that you are willing to undertake such a thing now, with this sorrow upon us."

"Why not?" calmly asked Mrs. Hardwick. "Should I hide my head because of our misfortune? Should I bewail my fate? No, a thousand times no. I thank the Lord I have the strength to do my duty as I see it. My sorrow is none the less on that account and anyone who would question it would be beneath contempt." As she spoke her voice was raised and, at the end, she almost shouted.

Hardwick did not answer. It was impossible, unnatural, but he had no word to offer that seemed appropriate.

Mrs. Hardwick ate in silence for a little while and then resumed her story.

"We decided that it would scarcely do to begin before the first of the year, and that it would take all of the intervening time to secure a sufficient number of subscriptions. We selected Thursday afternoon as a most convenient time and arranged for sixteen talks. This would take us to the end of April, which we thought

long enough." She paused and looked at her husband for approval. But she found nothing in his expression that even remotely resembled it.

"Do you mean that you are actually going on with this thing?" he asked, almost sternly.

"I certainly do," she answered with firmness.

"And are you going to undertake to instruct these people, that is if you can find any who will be willing to come, as to what is going on in the world?"

"Precisely that," replied Mrs. Hardwick with great emphasis.

"And what are you going to tell them, pray?" he asked scornfully.

"Your tone, my dear Henry," said his wife with her cackle in evidence, "is not exactly complimentary." She was making a great effort to control herself and spoke very slowly. "Your tone is scarcely calculated to invite further discussion of this matter with you. Your petulance amazes me, I do not say 'disappoints me,' for I am used to it and also to your rather absurd view of most things. However, I am going to tell you what I would say were I to discuss to-day's current topics. For instance, the situation in Russia is most peculiar. The flight of Kerensky and the foundation of a government by Lenine induces a questioning attitude on the part of the rest of the world. It is yet too early to decide definitely as to the causes which have brought about this new revolution. I may state, however, that

it appears to me no more than a local insurrection in the capital of Russia which will undoubtedly lack support in the provinces where the great bulk of the population is found." She paused and again looked for approval, and again was disappointed.

"They can read all of that in the newspapers," he said rather contemptuously, "if they're interested."

"Ah!" cried Mrs. Hardwick, "that's just it. They *won't* read it in the newspapers because they wouldn't understand it if they did. It requires explanation. And with explanation, the sort of insight which I flatter myself I shall be able to furnish, it will become not merely interesting but positively absorbing. Consider President Wilson's wishes with reference to the labor situation. Do you suppose that many women read that sort of an article? I should say, not one in a hundred—"

"Did you read it?" interrupted Hardwick.

"Certainly not," answered his wife earnestly.

"Well, what do you know about it then?" he asked triumphantly.

"Nothing at all," replied Mrs. Hardwick serenely, "except what was contained in the headline. That exactly proves my contention. If I, who may claim at least an ordinary interest in what is going on in the world; if I, therefore, am not led to read such an article, what do you suppose is the likelihood that it will be read by Mrs. Jones or Mrs. Brown or Mrs. Robinson?

But these same women will seize the opportunity to have me *tell* them about it." Mrs. Hardwick was so pleased with her demonstration that all traces of her momentary sarcastic attitude departed and she beamed upon her spouse.

"Oh! Well," said he, "what's the use of our talking about it. You'll never be able to put it over."

"'Put it over,'" quoted Mrs. Hardwick. "Henry, my dear, I do wish you would not use these common expressions, particularly in Marian's hearing. She already shows a propensity, singular in a child of mine, to employ vulgarisms such as these, and she should, therefore, be shown a better example. As to my ability to make a success of the project, you need have no fears, I shall see to that. The only question is just how to limit the attendance. Mrs. Hutchinson and I discussed this aspect of the affair very seriously and we came finally to the conclusion to limit the attendance to one thousand—"

"One thousand!" cried Hardwick. "You must be crazy!"

But Mrs. Hardwick paid no attention to his interruption and went on calmly.

"We decided to rent Wilberforce Hall, which seats exactly nine hundred and ninety-six in the auditorium. We have not actually rented the hall for the sixteen Thursdays from January to April inclusive, but we have the refusal of nearly all of them until to-morrow.

Unfortunately, two Thursday afternoons, one in January and one in February, have already been engaged, and, if it is not possible to secure them, we shall have to select some other day in those weeks."

Hardwick was more and more amazed.

"You rented Wilberforce Hall for sixteen afternoons!" he cried. "Do you know what that will cost?"

"Certainly," answered Mrs. Hardwick, as one would reply to a sick child, "I have had no actual business experience, but may lay claim to some knowledge of the elements. The rent for the sixteen afternoons will be exactly twelve hundred dollars. I believe that sixteen times seventy-five is twelve hundred."

"Well, there's one good thing," said Hardwick, bitterly, "if they trust you, they won't be able to collect the money from either of us."

"Have no fear on that score, my dear Henry, no one will come to you for any of that money. You will be asked neither for money nor advice." Mrs. Hardwick delivered herself of this with a magnificent gesture, and, rising from the table, went out into the kitchen.

CHAPTER XXIII

VELYN BURCHARD, when she married L. Percival Sedley in 1897, was a young girl who had been brought up in the conventional manner in vogue at that period with families of long established standing and of considerable wealth. She had no ideals of any consequence, no standards that were not utterly commonplace. Her education had been accomplished without developing any real taste for any of the fine arts. Her beauty and a pleasing manner made her popular and her marriage to a man whom both heredity and circumstance had endowed with great wealth had opened to her a great social career. She had no children and was therefore entirely free to devote herself continuously to "society," as it is called.

For many years, the ceaseless round among the same set of people, varied by occasional trips to Europe, completely satisfied her. But, when she was about thirty-five, in 1912, to be exact, she found that she no longer cared to participate in what passed among her set for entertainment. Nor did she enjoy the fact that her maturity compelled her to take second place with respect to younger women. Besides, she was tired of it. She wanted something new and she found it in a number of enterprises of a public nature. Her great wealth and definite social position procured for her a

prominent place in any undertaking with which she associated herself. She also found pleasure in patronizing the arts, and, although she really knew nothing of any of them, had no trouble in drawing to her a large number of people, either active or merely interested in painting, music or literature.

It was through the last of these that she had made the acquaintance of Mrs. Hardwick. That enterprising lady had not been slow to take advantage of her opportunity to meet a woman of such prominence as Mrs. Sedley, and had once succeeded in having her call at the Hardwick house. That was the occasion on which the visiting card had been secured, the card that, apparently by mere accident, always topped the collection on Mrs. Hardwick's tray.

Through their association in the same Red Cross Auxiliary, Mrs. Hardwick had the chance, as she thought, to improve their acquaintance and had actually succeeded to the point where Mrs. Sedley had felt impelled to pay a visit of condolence. Mrs. Sedley was not particularly drawn to Mrs. Hardwick, but, at the same time, was much impressed by that lady's volubility in the exposition of her literary opinions. Knowing practically nothing of literature herself, she looked upon Mrs. Hardwick as a woman of great endowments in this art and was ready to place as high a valuation upon her erudition as that lady herself.

Mrs. Hardwick counted upon Mrs. Sedley for

endorsement of her project to deliver her current topics talks. Therefore, on Wednesday morning, immediately following her discussion of the matter with her husband, she called Mrs. Sedley on the telephone and obtained permission to pay her a visit to discuss a matter of great importance.

Mrs. Hardwick arrived at the Sedley house at eleven o'clock and had but a few minutes to wait before she was received by Mrs. Sedley.

She looked about her after the servant left her. Never, she thought, had she been in so beautiful a house. What was it, she wondered, that gave it so restful an air that seemed to be in perfect keeping with the quiet which hung over the house, into which, at intervals, came the noises from the street, muffled as though they had come from a great distance.

Mrs. Hardwick noted details, a chair here, a table there, and in separate details did she seek the secret of the charm of the room. It eluded her, however, and her mind was already bent on other things when she heard a step on the stair and, in a moment, her hostess had greeted her.

"Dear Mrs. Sedley," she said, unctuously, as soon as the customary greetings were over, "I have come to enlist your help in a project which I am sure you will instantly pronounce as possessing great possibilities for public benefit. You have met my friend, Mrs. Hutchinson, I believe; Mrs. Harrod Hutchinson, a woman of

great discrimination in literary matters. I have discussed my plans with her and have been encouraged to believe that what, at first, was a most modest undertaking, might be turned to large account by the assistance of your commanding position in the community, a position, I may say, due not to your wealth and elevated social standing, but entirely to a personality in which great charm and aesthetic judgment vie for supremacy." Mrs. Hardwick paused, and, as usual, devoted the breathing spell to the observation of the effect of her words upon the listener.

With Mrs. Sedley, she had struck exactly the right note. Her wealth and social position were an old story, but her recent standing, that of a recognized patron of the arts, was newer and, therefore, not so well established in her own mind as the certainty of her wealth and social position. Confirmation of it from others, therefore, was sweet music in her ears.

"What is your project, Mrs. Hardwick?" asked Mrs. Sedley with an appearance of great interest.

"The world war and the great upheaval consequent thereto are making history at unparalleled speed. Day after day, new problems arise, new movements are perceived, and the mind of the ordinary man, nay, even the cultured man or woman, is bewildered in the attempt to follow the progress of events. But a few days ago we were watching the advance of the Germans into Italy with excitement and apprehension. Last week

the fall of the Kerensky government claimed our attention and set us to wonder. To-day we are face to face with a labor movement in our own country of such proportions that the President has deemed it necessary to take a hand. All of this vast moving panorama is confusing to us unless it is co-ordinated and correlated by someone who has the insight to delve into the mystery and the ability to set clearly before us the results of the inquiry.

"I have given this matter much earnest thought and have come to the conclusion, I hope I am not overrating myself, that I can bring to many people, who are without either the opportunity or the ability to do it for themselves, an understanding of these matters which, with a minimum of effort and expense on their part, will make the whole concatenation of events clear to them." Again Mrs. Hardwick paused and noted that she had Mrs. Sedley's complete attention.

"Please go on, Mrs. Hardwick," said she, "this is most interesting."

"It is my intention," resumed that lady, "to give a series of sixteen talks on current topics, at weekly intervals, on Thursdays, beginning January third. In these talks I shall present the important happenings of the previous week, with an interpretation of them which will make them clear to every auditor. It is my purpose ——"

"Oh! That will be splendid," cried Mrs. Sedley, enthusiastically.

"I was sure you would approve," said Mrs. Hardwick, "and I am very happy that I was not mistaken, for I count upon your help to assure the success of the series."

"I'll be delighted to assist you. What can I do?"

"I want you to be the first of my patronesses, if you will be so kind."

"Certainly. Whom else will you have?"

"I should like Mrs. Ingham, Mrs. Kennedy Brown, Mrs. Lorimer—" and Mrs. Hardwick went on to name about twenty-five women, all of them prominent in society, not one of whom, however, she had met.

"A splendid list, Mrs. Hardwick," said her hostess. "Have you spoken to any of them?"

"Not yet. In fact, I felt that the project was of such importance to the community that I did not care to go on with it until I had secured your approval and promise of patronage. Now that you have so kindly given me both of these, I am going to count upon your well-known public spirit for co-operation in securing the rest of the patronesses."

"But how?" queried Mrs. Sedley. She was wondering just what Mrs. Hardwick would demand of her and became somewhat less cordial. Mrs. Hardwick, however, paid no attention to the change in Mrs. Sedley's demeanor and went on sweetly:

"I haven't had the pleasure of meeting some of these ladies personally. They do not know who I am and for

me to apply to them directly without your support and approval would entail much delay and might defeat the great object which I have in view, which is to reach the largest possible number of people." Mrs. Hardwick put on what was intended to be a most engaging smile.

"But what do you want me to do?" asked Mrs. Sedley, anxiously.

"I should like you to invite these ladies to meet at your house, and, so to speak, organize the patronage of my talks. I would be here, and would take charge of everything; you would have to give yourself no concern whatever. Of course, it would be most appropriate if you were to make a little address in which you might state your enthusiastic interest in the project."

Mrs. Sedley was not sure she liked the programme which her guest had in view. However, she saw no great trouble in it for herself and she therefore gave her assent.

"Very well, Mrs. Hardwick," she said, "when would you suggest that we hold the meeting?"

"Let me see, this is Wednesday. Would next Wednesday afternoon suit you?"

"Very well. In what form would you suggest we make the invitation?"

"I have thought of that. Since you have been good enough to stand as sponsor for the undertaking, we must take no chance of failure. It has therefore appeared

to me that the best way in which to assure a full attendance at this meeting will be for you to give me a letter of introduction to each of these ladies in a form which I have already composed, and which will contain an invitation to attend the meeting and become one of the patronesses."

Mrs. Sedley was dubious and would have been glad to withdraw. Perhaps Mrs. Hardwick suspected this, for she went on hastily.

"It will be a matter of a couple hours' work for your secretary. I shall submit the form of the letter to you for your approval, of which I am quite sure, and then, if you will be good enough to have her set to work on them immediately, I can get them from her this afternoon and begin at once, presenting them in person to the ladies to whom they are addressed."

"Have you the letter already written?" asked Mrs. Sedley.

"Yes, I have it here. I'll show it to you directly. But first, I must speak to you about a matter concerning which I feel a most natural delicacy. You need not be told that there will be considerable expense attached to the giving of these talks on the large scale which we have in mind. I hope I have not judged incorrectly in presuming that you would make, may I say, a liberal subscription for tickets." Mrs. Hardwick paused and fixed her gaze on Mrs. Sedley. Instinctively, she knew that until the latter had answered she must be silent and she was.

Mrs. Sedley took but a moment. She might have taken longer were it not that silence under Mrs. Hardwick's direct gaze was most uncomfortable.

"Why, certainly, Mrs. Hardwick," she said, rather nervously. "What do you expect of me?"

"I don't suppose it will seem very much to you," said Mrs. Hardwick in a deprecatory manner. "There are to be sixteen talks, and at one dollar each, the price for all would be sixteen dollars. I have, however, decided to ask but fifteen for the course. I presumed that you would be willing to subscribe for six course tickets." Again her gaze was fixed on Mrs. Sedley.

Fortunately for Mrs. Hardwick, ninety dollars was not much for Mrs. Sedley to spend for anything, and, while that lady thought it rather steep, she was unable under that fixed look of definite expectation to do anything but acquiesce.

"Oh! That will be quite satisfactory, Mrs. Hardwick," she said.

"Thank you very much. I knew your public spirit and generosity would not fail, and to prove that there is no flattery in this, let me show you the letter I have composed." Mrs. Hardwick drew a letter from her pocket with great care. The care was undertaken to assure her bringing forth the copy which she had prepared which stated that Mrs. Sedley had subscribed to six course tickets, and to avoid showing those which stated respectively four and two.

She handed the letter to Mrs. Sedley, who read:

Dear Mrs. Blank:

This will introduce to you Mrs. Henry Wallace Hardwick, with whom I have been acquainted for a number of years. Mrs. Hardwick is to give a series of talks on current topics, on Thursday afternoons beginning January third, and I wish to enlist your interest in behalf of the project.

From what I know of Mrs. Hardwick's ability and attainments, she is singularly well fitted to undertake the work. Consequently I have consented to act as patroness, and as a mark of my interest have subscribed to six course tickets.

May I add my request to that of Mrs. Hardwick to the effect that you will also become a patroness and in that capacity attend a meeting at my house on next Wednesday afternoon at four o'clock?

Mrs. Hardwick will explain the matter to you in full detail.

Mrs. Sedley read the letter carefully. "It seems very business-like," she said doubtfully.

"I tried to make it so. It appears to me that that is the correct basis. I take it for granted that the letter is satisfactory to you and that you will have your secretary set to work at them at once. I shall call for them as soon as they are ready."

"Very well, Mrs. Hardwick," answered Mrs. Sedley.

"But I cannot sign them until late this afternoon. I am going out almost immediately and will not return until nearly dinner time." Mrs. Sedley rose, which Mrs. Hardwick judged correctly was a sign of dismissal, and she also rose.

"My dear Mrs. Sedley," she said, "I cannot sufficiently express my delight in your whole-hearted co-operation. I shall endeavor to show my appreciation by making this course of talks, to which you have been good enough to lend your support, a great success, one that will, if possible, add to your already great reputation as the possessor of a fine public spirit. Good morning. I shall call for the letters at seven this evening. Will you give me your secretary's name?"

"Miss Hatch," answered Mrs. Sedley. "Good morning and good luck."

"Thank you ever so much, dear Mrs. Sedley. Good morning." And Mrs. Hardwick went down the street elated.

CHAPTER XXIV

DIRECTLY after lunch on that same day Mrs. Hardwick sought her friend Mrs. Hutchinson. She called her on the telephone and made an appointment to visit her immediately. Mrs. Hutchinson sent her car for her and in a very few minutes the two ladies were in earnest conclave.

"My dear," said Mrs. Hardwick, "we shall have at least twenty patronesses selected from the most exclusive people in the city. I have no doubt that none of them will feel satisfied to do less in the way of subscription than Mrs. Sedley. That will mean, at ninety dollars each, nearly two thousand dollars. We may be sure of the success of the undertaking, certainly from the financial aspect. Now, we must go at once and engage the hall."

The prospect seemed almost too good to Mrs. Hutchinson. She was inclined to be cautious, and urged delay. "There may be disappointments, you know," she said.

"Impossible," said Mrs. Hardwick, and much more which showed such complete confidence, such utter determination that Mrs. Hutchinson was literally carried off her feet and, in a few minutes, was taken into town by Mrs. Hardwick in her own car.

At the office of the manager of Wilberforce Hall, Mrs. Hardwick did all of the talking. She was in her

element, for the manager was an unassuming little man, one of the sort who might always be counted upon for the display of discretion rather than valor.

"Mr.——, I believe I have forgotten your name," began Mrs. Hardwick in a most business-like tone.

"Spafford," contributed the manager.

"Oh! yes, Mr. Spafford. Well, Mr. Spafford, you told me yesterday that you had two of my Thursday afternoons engaged."

"Yes, madam." He consulted a memorandum book.

"The second in January and the third in February."

"I should like you to cancel those contracts," said Mrs. Hardwick, quite calmly, with no idea that she was proposing anything very extraordinary.

"Impossible," said the manager, aghast.

"That is a word which I do not admit into my vocabulary. It is not impossible. The days under consideration have not yet arrived, and therefore it is quite possible for those who have engaged these days to make a change in their plans."

"But my dear Madam——"

"No buts, if you please. Have the kindness to tell me by whom these days were engaged."

"The January date was engaged by the Steinmetz Musical Academy, and the other by Henry Barberton, the lecturer."

"I know Mr. Steinmetz very well. You will please tell him I should like to have him change his day. As for Mr. Barberton——"

"But, madam, we never—we have never." The poor little man could not go on; such a proposal had never been made to him before. Mrs. Hardwick did not give him a chance to collect his scattered wits, however, and went on serenely:

"On second thought you need not concern yourself with Mr. Steinmetz, I shall see to him, but I look to you to effect the change in Mr. Barberton's date. That is final. Now, if you will be good enough to make out the papers necessary to secure the first sixteen Thursday afternoons in the New Year, I shall be glad to sign."

"But I cannot rent the hall to you on dates which have already been taken."

"Yes, you can. You may possibly not be able to give me possession of the hall on those dates, but you can rent it to me, and I insist that you do so."

"Well," said the manager, yielding not so much to her arguments as to his fear of further discussion with her, "if I may insert a proviso that the two days in question are to be subject to the withdrawal of their present holders, I see no difficulty."

"You might have saved some time and trouble," said Mrs. Hardwick severely, "if you had done so in the first place. As I said, I will answer for Mr. Steinmetz's withdrawal and even Mr. Barberton's, if you should not be able to obtain it."

Mr. Spafford filled out a form of lease which he handed to Mrs. Hardwick.

"Where are the dates specified?" she asked.

He pointed out the place and Mrs. Hardwick examined it, and, having satisfied herself on this one point, asked for a pen.

"One moment, please, Madam," said the little man, "I must ask you—it is quite customary to make a deposit." He was very much abashed.

"That is perfectly satisfactory," said Mrs. Hardwick in her grandest manner, "how much do you wish?"

"I think in this case that two hundred dollars would be sufficient. You might then pay sixty odd dollars before each performance."

"Performance!" cried Mrs. Hardwick. "I am not going to give a performance. I shall deliver a series of talks on current topics. I object to the word 'performance'."

"I beg your pardon," said the manager meekly. "I used the word unintentionally, quite."

"Very well," said Mrs. Hardwick grandly. "When do you wish this payment?"

"Now," replied the manager. "I am very sorry, but it is our custom, and I am unable to change it."

"You need not apologize," said Mrs. Hardwick. "Unfortunately, I have not my check book with me. I believe you have yours, have you not?" She turned to Mrs. Hutchinson.

That lady had it, but she did not wish to advance so large a sum. She would have liked to deny having

it, but Mrs. Hardwick's air was so positive that she felt the check-book's presence in her bag must be known by her friend, so, inwardly reluctant, she produced it.

"I don't know whether my balance is as large as that," she said apologetically.

"You might look, if you please," said Mrs. Hardwick. Her tone was honey, but Mrs. Hutchinson felt it as a command.

In a few minutes the check was written and the lease signed and then the ladies departed.

At seven o'clock Mrs. Hardwick called at the Sedley house and received her letters of introduction from Miss Hatch. She regretted her inability to use any of them until the next day, so impatient was she to push forward with the enterprise. It was the first time in her life that she had ever engaged in any solicitation of this sort. Always before, her efforts had been devoted to obtaining small subscriptions for small charities. As might be expected, she had been a member of various literary societies, usually intimate affairs which held their meetings at the several members' houses, but that was all.

But now, at last, she felt that she was coming into her own, that this was her true vocation. This was a serious business for her in which her conscious purpose was confined to the good work she would do in the way of educating the public. Mrs. Hardwick was never in any doubt as to the extraordinarily high quality of her

intellectuality. Her readiness of speech was a complete deception even to herself. Her opinions, on whatever subject, were sound because they were positive. Words came to her as insects to a flame; her glibness of speech, the result of infinite practice in unending garrulity, had become second nature, and she seized upon any aspect of whatever subject attracted her attention and her volubility upon that one aspect made it appear to unthinking listeners as the whole of the subject. And even more than to her listeners did it so appear to her. Consequently, she almost never made a thorough study of anything. She went only deep enough to find material for speech and, that point once reached, she felt that the subject was completely within her grasp and dilated upon what she knew accordingly.

Hardwick did not dine at home on that evening. He was at work in the office upon the catalogue. Mrs. Hardwick was disappointed, because she wanted him to hear about the progress she had made. When he came home it was very late and he was too tired and sleepy to pay much attention to her.

However, when she asked him whether he could advance two hundred dollars which she had borrowed of Mrs. Hutchinson, he told her flatly that he could not do so because he did not have it. Mrs. Hardwick did not argue the matter with him and dropped the subject completely, much to his relief. He wanted to sleep.

Promptly the next day Mrs. Hardwick set about the

delivery of her letters. By dint of great perseverance, she succeeded in obtaining as patronesses five of the six women she saw on that day, every one of whom subscribed to at least four tickets, and three of them took six. Mrs. Hardwick did not rest content with mere promises to subscribe but asked for and obtained payment in each case. Thus, armed with three hundred and ninety dollars, she was more jubilant than ever, and, as she paid over to Mrs. Hutchinson the two hundred dollars she had borrowed the day before, she drew a vivid picture, in many, many words, of the furore that the talks would cause.

"Really, my dear," she said, "it will be wonderful. My only regret is that I never thought of it before. I know that this idea is not new, but really it has never been done well. If you will pardon what seems to be vanity, I shall tell you that I shall surpass the expectations of everyone. I have given the matter constant thought and am convinced that my grasp of the problem is as nearly complete as anything human could be. Mrs. Ingham, you have heard of her, of course, was wonderfully impressed. And Mrs. Cartwright, a most charming woman, you know of them, the Cartwrights are so much in the public eye, was really enthusiastic." And so on.

By Saturday afternoon, as the result of almost incredible labor and perseverance, Mrs. Hardwick had secured eighteen acceptances, in each case accom-

panied by a subscription. Altogether she had received nearly fourteen hundred dollars. She deposited this money, except, of course, the two hundred dollars she had paid to Mrs. Hutchinson, in her private account, and on Sunday paid every one of her household bills. Altogether this took less than four hundred dollars.

She had not mentioned the matter again to her husband. With his refusal to advance the two hundred dollars necessary to repay Mrs. Hutchinson, Mrs. Hardwick had suddenly remembered that she had told him that she would come to him neither for money nor advice. For once, therefore, she was reticent and did not take him further into her confidence. Hardwick was really not much interested. He figured that the project was foredoomed to failure and, when it did occur to him, presumed that it was dead.

He did not even observe the payment of her bills on Sunday. He was busy for much of the day with the preparation of the advertising copy for McCabe. When he began work upon it, he regretted that he had ever undertaken it. He felt guilty, ashamed. He told himself that he had in no way been influenced in McCabe's favor with regard to placing the contract for printing the catalogue. McCabe had earned that work by his low price, and, by giving the order to him the company had saved a thousand dollars. This thought and many more of a similar kind finally gave his conscience partial ease and interest in the work did the rest.

Mrs. Hardwick set to work again promptly on Monday morning. There were still several of the proposed patronesses to see and she saw them, and, in most cases, secured their acceptances and subscriptions.

On Monday afternoon and Tuesday she and Mrs. Hutchinson attended to ordering the necessary printing and also visited one of the newspaper offices. Mrs. Hardwick took it for granted that an announcement of her plans would gladly be printed as news by the editor and was much disappointed when she was referred to the advertising department. She indignantly refused to advertise, and told the editor that he quite misunderstood her purpose. This was a public matter, one of interest to everybody, and that it was most important that they print news of it.

"But you charge admission," said the editor.

"No tickets will be sold," answered Mrs. Hardwick, in her grandest manner. "I do not wish you to understand that admission is free; that would not be correct. Admission will be limited strictly to subscribers, and, as I have engaged Wilberforce Hall, there will be accommodations for only one thousand people. At the meeting of patronesses, to-morrow afternoon, at Mrs. L. Percival Sedley's house, we shall—"

"Mrs. L. Percival Sedley," interrupted the editor. "Has she anything to do with it?"

"Mrs. Sedley heads the list of patronesses. There are also Mrs. Ingham, Mrs. Cartwright," and Mrs. Hardwick gave the complete list.

"Did you say there would be a meeting at Mrs. Sedley's house to-morrow afternoon?"

"Yes, and at the meeting we shall—"

"Mrs. Hardwick," again interrupted the editor, "will you give us an exclusive account of that meeting?"

"Certainly not," answered she, seeing that the tables were turned, "but I will agree to give you an authoritative interview. You may use *my* name. You may have a reporter at my house at half-past six." ^A

The editor did not seem to be much excited by the permission to use Mrs. Hardwick's name, but said:

"Thank you very much."

Mrs. Hardwick's efforts with the other papers were equally fruitful and she came home that evening feeling very well content with the result of her work.

The meeting at Mrs. Sedley's house the next day, however, gave her the greatest joy she had ever known. In the first place, she was in the company of the richest and socially most exclusive women in the city, and, what was most sweet to her, was treated by them with great respect. There were half a dozen women there whose mental capacity far exceeded hers, but not one who was a fair match for her in fluent talk. She managed the meeting from beginning to end and was surprised to find that these women of wealth and fashion, whom she had vaguely imagined as creatures superior to their sisters, were quite as easy to order about, quite as ready to follow the definite initiative of another, as any of their sex she had ever met.

Mrs. Hardwick arranged everything. Each patroness was to have a certain number of subscriptions to dispose of. All subscriptions were to be made through patronesses; no tickets were to be sold to the general public. The audience was to be selected with great care. Each patroness was to be furnished with a form letter which she was to send to a chosen list announcing to the recipient that he or she was granted permission to subscribe to the course, the offer to be dated and open for two days only. After that it was to be withdrawn. Everybody was delighted with the unique plan and all of them left the meeting enthusiastic, Mrs. Hardwick's closing speech still ringing in their ears.

"And now, ladies, I wish to thank you for the interest you have taken in this work. It proves to me that my conviction of its usefulness to the public was well founded. It will be an example to others, to follow where we have led. It will be a stimulus to many thousands to devote their efforts to acquiring a correct view of contemporary events. I have no doubt that it will be the means to bring about a country-wide interest, not only in world politics, but in American national and local politics as well, and thus will be prepared the solid ground work for fitness to discharge the duties entailed upon our sex by the imminent grant of suffrage.

"Ladies I thank you!"

CHAPTER XXV

HARDWICK came home that evening suffering from a severe depression of spirits. He had been called into Pemberton's office during the afternoon and a categorical statement of the condition of the work on the catalogue had been demanded. When the matter was reduced to the actual accomplishment, it was evident that Hardwick was far behind his schedule, even allowing for his loss of time owing to Alice's death. Practically every portion of the work was under way, but now, at the end of November, nearly all of the preparatory work should have been completed, and not quite half of it was done.

"I am very much disappointed, Hardwick," said Pemberton coldly. "You have fallen far short of what you promised. I see that I cannot leave this matter entirely in your hands, and will have to ask that you make a daily report to me hereafter. I want you to have a schedule prepared and I shall see that it is followed exactly.

"I see you have placed this order with the McCabe concern," he continued. "What led you to do that?"

"McCabe's price was a thousand dollars less than any of the others," answered Hardwick. He was very uncomfortable.

"I wouldn't have placed the business with him if his

price had been five thousand dollars less. You ought to know him. The man's crooked and is not to be depended on in any way. His work is not first class and his methods are rotten. It's poor business to save a thousand dollars if by doing so you run the chance of spoiling a fifteen thousand dollar job. You ought to know all about him. You're no new comer in this business."

"I felt that I knew enough about the printing business to make McCabe give us what we want," answered Hardwick. "I've made him agree to submit every form before he starts to run and I've put a penalty of fifty dollars a day on him for delay in delivery."

"That's downright silly," said Pemberton sternly. "That sort of agreement won't hold water, and McCabe won't be slow to take advantage of it. As to your running his business for him, and that's what you propose to do when you show your distrust of him by exacting the right to pass on his work in process, that's entirely out of your province. I made my views on the buying of printing clear to you at the beginning and this is exactly what I told you not to do."

"I'm very sorry," began Hardwick, and then was silent.

"So am I," answered Pemberton, "but that does no good now. I should like to see McCabe. Have him here to-morrow morning at ten, and get that schedule ready for me." There was a finality in his tone which indicated to Hardwick that the interview was at an end. He got

up from his chair and was about to leave the room, when Pemberton said:

"Send Miss Bernstein to me."

"Very well," answered Hardwick and left.

He told Ruth that Mr. Pemberton wished to see her and then sat down at his desk. He was completely discouraged. It seemed that he could not make a success of anything. Some evil fate constantly pursued him and set all of his plans at naught.

But he did not have long to bewail his portion undisturbed. As soon as Ruth left the office, Miss Henderson came over to him and sat down at his desk. She looked worried, he noted an unusual pallor in her face.

"What is it?" he asked.

"I've pulled an awful bone-head stunt," she began nervously. "I don't know what you'll think of me."

"Well?" he asked, disturbed.

"You know that stuff you gave me to copy for you that you told me you wanted kept dark."

"Yes, what about it? You gave it to me a little while ago; it was all right."

"I know, but there was one page that had some mistakes in it and I re-wrote it; I thought I had thrown it in the waste basket." She paused.

"Well?" he asked anxiously. "Go on."

"I don't know how I ever did it, but I got it mixed with some stuff I was copying for Miss Bernstein."

Hardwick had a sudden sinking sensation as Miss Henderson continued:

"Just a little while ago, when you were in with the boss, she called me and asked what it was. Well, you could have knocked me down with a feather. I was so fussed that I couldn't say a word. I just took the paper and walked away. Are you awful sore at me?"

"What did you do with the paper?" asked Hardwick. He was making a great effort to master the fear that gripped him. He wondered whether his agitation showed in his demeanor.

"I tore it up," answered Miss Henderson contritely. "I guess you think I'm some boob."

"Oh! It's of no consequence," said Hardwick after a moment. "Don't bother about it. You didn't do it intentionally. It really doesn't matter, there wasn't any occasion to make a great secret of it." He had suddenly remembered that there was nothing in the copy to indicate that it was for McCabe and that it would not be difficult to explain in the unlikely event that the question should be put to him.

"Oh! I'm awful glad," said Miss Henderson, and left him, visibly relieved.

But she had no sooner left him than he was again troubled. What a silly ass he was, after all, to have had Miss Henderson make the copy for him. Why hadn't he taken it to some stenographer outside? And then he remembered he had not done so after having thought of it because he was afraid that he might accidentally run into someone who would think it quite suspicious

for him to go to some stenographer outside of the office. Not that he feared that anyone would question him; it was suspicion that he could not meet, the whispering about him that he would not hear.

And then he wished again that he had never undertaken the work at all. How had he ever been such a fool as to let himself drift into this mess? He saw the whole transaction now in its true light. He had allowed himself to be played upon by McCabe as though he were the merest beginner, he, Hardwick, who had always rather looked down upon McCabe as distinctly his inferior. And then he began to excuse himself. It was his pressing want of money which had blinded him, the extravagance of his wife, and, in a sullen fit of anger at her, he found some relief from his self-recrimination.

Mechanically, he began to prepare the schedule which Pemberton had demanded, and, as he got into the work, it suddenly occurred to him that the management of the catalogue was being taken out of his hands, and that he had lost Pemberton's confidence. He gave himself up to sheer misery as he worked mechanically at the schedule. Would nothing ever go right with him? Why was he always to fail, why was he always the sport of the fates? In his desperation he tried to put these thoughts out of his mind, but he could not do so, and, although he applied himself to his work, they recurred and recurred.

Meanwhile Ruth had entered Pemberton's office.

"What's the matter with Hardwick on this catalogue?" he asked brusquely, as she entered.

"I'm not sure that I know what you mean," she answered.

"Why has he gotten behind with his copy?"

"He's had all sorts of trouble. Every shop in town is short handed. The photographers have disappointed him again and again."

"Why does he let them disappoint him? He ought to keep after them, he's surely had enough experience with those fellows. They're all alike. Sit down, won't you?" Ruth had been standing all of this time. She seated herself.

"He has been keeping after them all of this and last week," she said. "The work's going pretty well now. He ought to have everything in the printer's hands by the tenth or twelfth of December. He works at it nearly every night."

"That reminds me. How did he happen to give this job to McCabe? Do you know anything about it?"

"Yes; McCabe's bid was a thousand dollars lower than any other."

"But he's no good. He never should have had a chance to bid."

Ruth was silent. Pemberton looked for a reply, but, receiving none, asked:

"Don't you think so?"

"I wouldn't give him any work. I don't think he's trustworthy."

"Did Hardwick consult you?"

"He discussed the matter with me, but he didn't ask my advice."

"Did you encourage him to give the work to McCabe?"

"No."

"Did you advise him not to?"

"Not exactly, but I told him of Mr. McNair's experience."

Pemberton was silent for a moment.

"I wonder whether there's any graft in this," he said thoughtfully.

"Oh! I'm sure there's not," said Ruth hastily. But as she uttered the words, it suddenly occurred to her that the piece of advertising copy which Miss Henderson had inadvertently given her might have been work done for McCabe by Hardwick. There was no real reason for it, but the stenographer's obvious confusion and her taking the paper away without making any answer made it clear that she had been instructed to keep the matter secret. No one in the office could have given her the work to do except Hardwick, and his only reason for enjoining secrecy would be that it was work which he had a good reason for concealing.

Ruth was now convinced that Hardwick was working for McCabe. She did not see that the evidence was utterly incomplete, because the coincidence of Pemberton's question as to Hardwick's honesty and the

surreptitious writing of the copy was sufficient to put this idea into her head, not as a suspicion, but as a settled conviction. She was greatly troubled, for it was her first experience of the kind and she did not know what to do. She would have been much relieved had she been able to confide in Pemberton, but his position made him the last man in the world to whom she might tell it. She must get away and think it over alone. She would watch and wait.

These thoughts took the merest instant to form in her mind. Her demeanor gave no indication of her trouble and Pemberton had no inkling that her quick repudiation of his suspicion had been followed by more than suspicion on her own part. He was silent for a moment after she spoke and then said:

"Well, I've told Hardwick that I'm going to take a hand in the business. He's to prepare a schedule of the work for me, and to report daily. I've told him to bring McCabe here to-morrow morning and I'll put the fear of God into him." He smiled grimly.

Ruth again marvelled at him. What a wonderful man he was, unlike any other she had ever met. She felt, now that she knew that he would keep in close touch with the work on the catalogue, that the result would be all that could be wished for. There were no impossibilities for Pemberton; even facts, or what passed for facts with others, yielded before his will.

"I want you to keep your eyes open on this job, too,"

he continued. "I want you to report to me anything you think I ought to know. I don't believe there will be any need, but I want to be sure there'll be no slip ups."

"Very well," answered Ruth. She felt that the interview was over and got up to go.

"One minute," said Pemberton. "Have you anything on for this evening?"

"Why, no," she answered.

"Would you like me to run out to see you?"

"I'd be very glad."

"All right. I'll be out about eight o'clock." He felt happy in the prospect and forgot his anger. What difference did anything make, he thought, if he could have her.

When Ruth mentioned to her mother that Pemberton intended to spend the evening with her, Mrs. Bernstein showed that she was displeased.

"What's the matter, Mother?" Ruth asked.

"Nothing," answered that lady.

"Yes, there is. I can see it."

"No, there isn't."

"You're displeased because Fred's coming, aren't you?"

"Well, I don't like him, and I don't want you to marry him."

"Why not?"

"I've told you often I don't believe in marriages

between Jews and Christians, and, anyway, I don't like him. He's not polite."

"Fred isn't much of a Christian. He never goes to church. As for politeness, I don't know what you mean, he has fine manners."

Mrs. Bernstein did not dislike Pemberton for any reason that she was able to put into words. She did not like him and he did not like her because, basically, they were mutually antagonistic. As a matter of fact, she had no particular prejudice against Christians, she had no valid reasons against what she called "mixed marriages." She merely used these excuses to justify her dislike.

"He never pays any attention to what I say to him," she said. "He just sits there and I can see he's thinking of something else."

"Well, I haven't promised to marry him yet. I don't mind saying that I often think of it, but I just can't make up my mind. You know I've got a long time to think it over."

"I wish you'd give up your position there. We don't need the money now, since the Consolidated is paying dividends," said Mrs. Bernstein. This was a recent occurrence, the first payment of dividends, accompanied by a material rise in the market value of a mining stock in which the late Mr. Bernstein had made a considerable investment.

"Oh! I'd be unhappy if I couldn't go to the office,"

cried Ruth. "By the way, did you get a reference for that maid that promised to come?"

"Yes, she's a pretty good girl. I wonder whether she really will come. They're awfully scarce these days, and independent! You'd think they were doing you a favor."

"Well, they are, aren't they?" asked Ruth laughing.

As she was clearing the table after dinner, her mother said:

"If you marry Fred Pemberton, you know I couldn't live with you and we'd be separated."

"No, we wouldn't, cried Ruth. "Nobody will ever separate us."

"He will," said her mother, "if you marry him. He doesn't like me."

"Oh! that's foolish. He always speaks beautifully about you. He's always asking me how you are."

Several times, during Pemberton's visit, Ruth found herself on the point of speaking to him about her discovery, but checked herself each time. She was unusually happy in his company this evening, as he was in what was a gay humor for him; in fact, at one time, Ruth felt that he was actually about to laugh.

CHAPTER XXVI

MRS. HARDWICK was not generally an early riser, although she would have been quite indignant had anyone intimated a suspicion of the truth. And her indignation would have been inspired by the sincere belief that such an imputation was entirely outside of the facts. She did not count the times she was late, even though they greatly outnumbered the others; the extraordinary feeling of virtue which pervaded her when she actually arose early was sufficient to make her look upon her frequent lapses as quite exceptional.

However, on the morning following the meeting of patronesses at Mrs. L. Percival Sedley's house there was no doubt of her early rising. She was anxious to see the morning paper and, in her impatience, she came downstairs nearly half an hour before its arrival. It seemed much more to her, but when the newspaper was actually in her hands and she had read the account of the meeting, and had tasted the exquisite joy of seeing her name mentioned with those of the socially distinguished coterie who had lent the lustre of their names to her enterprise, she forgot all about the vexation she had experienced in waiting.

She had held to her reticence concerning this subject in her husband's presence, but now, with this palpable

proof of her success in the public prints, she was ready, nay, anxious to compel his admiration. He had not yet come downstairs, so she had ample opportunity to read the notice several times and then to leave the paper, folded so that, as she thought, his eye would instantly be attracted to it.

But this morning he was late, in a bad humor and in a great hurry. He did not even look at the newspaper, but tossed it to one side and bolted his breakfast in a few minutes. Directly he was through with it he left the house.

Mrs. Hardwick was disappointed but inclined to be philosophical. He would see the notice as he read the newspaper on his way to the office. Perhaps it was all the better so. Undoubtedly, it was in the other papers too, and people would be sure to speak to him of it during the day and he would come home immensely impressed.

She was going out this morning to see Mrs. Hutchinson to discuss some details of the project with her, and, after she had given some necessary instructions to her maid, she went upstairs to dress. She had scarcely begun, however, when there was a ring on the telephone. It was from a slight acquaintance of hers who, after the essential preliminaries, asked if she might subscribe to the course of talks. Mrs. Hardwick promised to secure her a ticket if possible and was about to resume dressing when the telephone rang again. It was another

request of the same nature, and after that she had no chance to finish dressing. All morning long she was answering the same kind of request. In her naïveté she took it as a personal testimonial and her spirits soared. Ah! success was sweet. Why had she permitted herself to remain so long in obscurity when the very first mention of her appearance in public brought such sweeping evidence of her popularity?

Hardwick's irritation was due to a restless night following his trouble of the day before. He hurried to the office and immediately got into touch with the several concerns who were working on the preparation of the catalogue. He impressed on every one of them the necessity for pushing the work, made his notations on the schedule he had prepared for Pemberton and sent it into the business manager's office.

At a few minutes before ten o'clock McCabe appeared.

"What's up?" he inquired, cheerfully.

"Mr. Pemberton wants to see you about the catalogue."

"Nothing wrong?" asked McCabe, apparently still cheerful, but inwardly somewhat uneasy.

"No," answered Hardwick in a manner which invalidated the direct negative of his answer. "He didn't say why he wanted to see you, but I suppose he wants to make sure there'll be no delay."

"Oh! if that's all, I can satisfy him," said McCabe with relief. "Let's go to him," he continued, anxious to have the interview over.

Hardwick called the operator and made known to Pemberton that McCabe was present. In a few minutes word came that Mr. Pemberton would see him.

Both men went into the business manager's office.

"You've met Mr. McCabe, I believe," said Hardwick as he closed the door behind him.

"Yes," answered Pemberton without looking up.

"Sit down, Mr. McCabe," he continued, and then looking at Hardwick, said to him, "Will you bring me the contract that we have made for the printing of this job?"

Hardwick left at once. As he walked to his own desk, he wondered what Pemberton was going to say to McCabe during his absence. Could it be that Miss Bernstein might have had her suspicion aroused by the scrap of copy which Miss Henderson had inadvertently given her and had communicated it to Pemberton? He experienced a sudden depression as this occurred to him and fear gripped him to such an extent that he was incapable of consecutive thought. He was ready to give up his position, go away, do anything rather than be subject to this horrible fear.

As he came to his desk, he saw Ruth working at hers. Her expression showed her intense interest in her work and made it perfectly obvious that she was not aware of his proximity, but, in the disordered state of his mind, he felt that she was consciously avoiding his glance, and this new idea confirmed the suspicion that she had told Pemberton about the piece of copy.

He took the contract from a drawer of his desk, and was about to return to Pemberton's office, when Ruth called to him. She asked some question of no great importance, but her manner completely reassured him and his recent fear vanished. He spoke with her in answer to her question for more than a minute and thus nearly three minutes passed while he was out of Pemberton's office.

Pemberton, as usual, wasted no time in preliminaries. As soon as Hardwick had gone, he began:

"See here, McCabe," he said, "you've got an order from this company that you'd never have had if I'd been consulted."

McCabe raised his hand in deprecation, but Pemberton paid no attention to his gesture and went on.

"The kind of work we expect on this book is better than you usually do. I don't know whether you can do as good work as we want or not, but I know you usually don't do it. Your price was one thousand dollars less than the lowest of four other bidders, and I want to give you notice right now that if you intended to save any large part of that difference by giving us an inferior quality of work, I won't stand for it." There was something in Pemberton's manner that was too much for McCabe. All of his usual assurance left him and he was mentally cringing before his superior adversary.

"Why, Mr. Pemberton," he began.

"Wait," said the other, "you'll get your chance to talk when you've heard what I have to say. If you listen to me, you'll know just what to answer instead of floundering around. You see, I know you and I know what your business methods are. I haven't forgotten the last transaction we had with you and I don't propose to have any repetition of it. Just so that you know where you're at in this thing, I don't mind telling you that I can cancel this order and all you'll be able to recover is the actual damage you have suffered. Actual damage, remember, not potential damage. You'll get a few hundred dollars and that's all. I tell you this to induce you to be reasonable."

The expression on McCabe's face at this moment indicated plainly that he was prepared to be reasonable or anything else that Pemberton might demand.

"What do you want?" he asked.

Hardwick came in before Pemberton had a chance to answer, laid the contract on his desk, and then sat down.

"I'll tell you in a minute," said Pemberton to McCabe, and then picked up the contract and set himself to reading it. As he read, the others looked about the room and at each other. They felt like criminals before the bar of justice, each, however, in his own way. Presently, Pemberton finished his reading and turning to Hardwick said:

"What does this mean; the specification 'Snowdrift Enamel or paper of equal quality'?"

"Mr. McCabe has submitted a sample of paper which I consider fully equal in every respect to Snowdrift and I have approved it."

Pemberton did not answer him, but turned to McCabe and asked:

"Was it the substitution of this paper for Snowdrift which made it possible for you to underbid the other fellows?"

"Yes," answered McCabe.

"What is the paper?"

"I can't tell you that. It's a confidential matter. I bought it way under price, and I'm giving you the advantage of the saving."

"If you won't tell me what it is, I'll refuse to accept it," said Pemberton quietly but with a positiveness that left no doubt that he would do exactly as he said.

"But Mr. Hardwick has already approved it," said McCabe.

"Very well. I repudiate Mr. Hardwick's action. The paper has not yet been made unmarketable. Use it for something else, or sell it. We'll take Snowdrift Enamel."

McCabe was beaten. He knew that Pemberton was not bluffing.

"It is Snowdrift Enamel," he said nervously.

"Seconds?" asked Pemberton.

"Not exactly," said McCabe, "it's a lot which was turned back on them for some reason or other, but it isn't seconds."

"But you bought it for seconds, didn't you? I mean at the price of seconds."

"Yes," answered McCabe. He was literally afraid to lie.

"Very well. Send us a few quires of the paper and we'll have it tested. Let me see, you saved over twelve hundred dollars on the paper, didn't you?"

"Yes," answered McCabe again.

"That explains the difference in price. At that rate your price is considerably higher for the labor on the job than those of your competitors. That establishes the fact that you're going to get a fair price for the work you do." He looked at McCabe searchingly, and awaited his assent.

And again McCabe said: "Yes."

"Now then, listen to me. There are two important questions to answer. First, can you, are you able to do a first-class job in every respect?"

"I can do as well as anybody in town. I have the best—"

"Never mind what you have," interrupted Pember-ton. "You've said you can make a first-class job and that's enough. Now, second, if we put all of the copy and cuts in your hands by the fifteenth of December, can you finish the work in a strictly first-class manner and deliver all of the books by January fifteenth?"

"Yes," said McCabe, "if there's no delay in passing proofs."

“Very well. Now listen to me again. The ordinary experience with printers who are either slow in delivery or who turn out work of an unsatisfactory quality is that you’ve got to take whatever they give you whenever they’re ready to give it to you simply because there is almost never time to replace the work elsewhere. This is not our case. I very much prefer to get out a catalogue because we have gotten one out every year. But this year I have the best excuse in the world for not getting one out. In the first place, I don’t know whether we’ll have any goods to sell, the government will commandeer every ounce of steel that’s made, and it’s extremely doubtful whether we’ll be able to get any supplies. And in the second, we have been urged to economize in our printing in order to save paper. I tell you these things because I’m quite willing to send out a mere price list with a circular telling the trade that, in view of conditions, we are not justified in issuing a catalogue. Take this from me: If your work is behind the time specified or is not fully up to the standard of quality which we demand, we’ll simply refuse to accept it and you’ll either pocket your loss of nearly nine thousand dollars immediately or throw good money after bad to the lawyers who’ll fool around with it for a couple of years to no purpose. Do you get me?” He looked sternly at McCabe, who was visibly uncomfortable.

“There’s no need of your telling me all this, Mr.

Pemberton," he said, "I'm going to give you a square deal. You'll get a first-class job in every respect and you'll get it on time."

"That's up to you. If you make good, all right. We'll pay your bill for the amount specified in your bid, but not one cent for extras unless you can show a written order stating the amount to be paid. If you fall down, you won't get a cent." Pemberton stood up, indicating that the interview was at an end.

The others rose also. As he got up McCabe said:

"You'd have all your plates on your hands."

"Sure," answered Pemberton. "We can use them next year just as well. Good morning, McCabe. Hardwick, I want to talk to you."

When the door closed on McCabe, Pemberton said:

"I thought you knew something about the printing business." There was a distinct sneer in his tone. Hardwick, who had sat, literally in wonder at the masterful manner in which Pemberton had handled McCabe, was himself so cowed by his superior that he did not even resent it.

"I thought I did," he answered.

"How do you explain the contract you made with that skin?"

"I wanted to save the difference of a thousand dollars and I counted upon watching the progress of the job so as to make sure we'd get the work done right and in good time."

"I told you what I thought of that yesterday, so there's no use repeating it." He paused for a moment. "I don't want you to place any more orders for printing without first submitting the matter to me. Now, let's go over your schedule."

When Hardwick left Pemberton's office, he was as miserable as he had ever been in his life. He felt utterly crushed, so completely hemmed in by his necessities that he could not assert the remnant of independence that was left in him. No, he must bear this for his family's sake. If he gave up this position, he would not know where to go, he would surely be unable to obtain a salary such as he had here, and even that was insufficient for his needs. Every cent of his December salary was already disposed of and was inadequate to redeem certain promises he had made to some of his creditors.

He came home in the evening wearied beyond measure, sick at heart, and when he opened the door the thought of Alice came to him and added to his sadness. Life seemed scarcely worth the burdens it imposed. But, on the other side of the door was Marian, and, in her embrace, much of his trouble left him, that is to say, he no longer felt active distress although he was still sore in spirit.

"Did you see about mother in the papers?" she cried.

"In the papers?" he queried. "What about?"

"Why, all about her current topics talks. It's in all the papers, and the telephone's been ringing all day

and mother's just gone over to Mrs. Hutchinson and said she'll be back soon, but she just had to go, she had to talk to her about hiring a somebody to attend to everything."

Hardwick was surprised. Was it possible, after all, that his wife was actually going to be able to make a success of this hare-brained scheme? It couldn't be true. This was just another of her fruitless efforts, with the result this time that their burden of debt would be still further increased. Well, a little more or a little less, what was the difference. Things could not be much worse. He turned to Marian.

"Well, Mamie, what have you been doing all day?"

CHAPTER XXVII

HARDWICK heard the account of his wife's triumph from her own lips without being much moved thereby. He had no doubt that she was exaggerating both her part in the project and what she called the great public interest in it and her. Strange to say, she did not tell him, even yet, of the financial aspect of the affair; she wanted to wait until she knew exactly the amount she would receive. When he asked her about it shortly before Christmas, she told him that the secretary, whom they had found it necessary to engage, would not likely be able to make a report for several days, and that she could not tell him accurately.

Really, Mrs. Hardwick was not as much interested in the money she was to receive as might be thought. She was neither accurate nor ready with figures and had only the most indistinct idea of the extent of the possible profit to come to her from her course of talks. She knew, of course, that she was sure to make a very considerable sum of money through them, and, although this gave her great pleasure, it paled almost into insignificance beside the complete satisfaction she felt in what she considered the public acclamation of her extraordinary mentality. She told Hardwick that she

did not wish him to spend much for a Christmas present for her in view of his being so short of funds.

The day before Christmas, the secretary turned over to Mrs. Hardwick over five thousand dollars and a statement to the effect that, after deducting all possible expenses, the course of talks would bring in a net return of about ten thousand dollars. Mrs. Hardwick was amazed. A return of such magnitude had never entered into her calculations. She was well aware that there was an enormous interest in the course, and attributed that largely to the public desire to learn from her lips the true meaning of the news of the day. She recognized the drawing power of her list of patronesses, but the absurdly high price and the sense of social distinction that each subscriber experienced when she was allotted her tickets did not seem to her the real reasons for the extraordinary success of the venture.

However, Mrs. Hardwick deposited her money with the greatest satisfaction in the world and, with difficulty, restrained her desire to tell her husband of it on Christmas eve when he came home for dinner. He was in a gay humor this evening, responding to the spirit of the occasion. He had brought home an armful of packages, buying a number of things at the last minute, candy, books, holly wreaths. For the moment, his worries were gone and only the thought of Alice tempered his joy in the holiday.

At dinner, however, Mrs. Hardwick talked much of

Alice, with the result that all of them were much depressed, and when, later in the evening, after Marian had gone to bed, they trimmed the Christmas tree together, their usual delight in it was painfully absent. Even Mrs. Hardwick was not talkative for once and altogether it was rather an unhappy Christmas eve.

Mrs. Hardwick had determined on a great surprise for Christmas morning. When they had finished breakfast, which proved to be rather a lively meal owing to Marian's joy in her presents, she asked Hardwick to come to the sewing room, where she had a little present for him. Wondering, he followed her, and, when she took a check from her writing table and handed it to him, his amazement at its amount was so great that he was incapable of speech. It was a check for one thousand dollars. Mrs. Hardwick beamed upon him as he stood there silent, his great surprise manifest in his startled expression.

"Florrie," he said at length, "what does this mean?"

"It means, my dear Henry, that our financial worries are over. I have already more than enough money to discharge every one of our obligations, and when all of the receipts are in my hands, I shall have much, much more. I have received a statement from my secretary which informs me that the profits which will finally accrue from my little series of talks will aggregate at least ten thousand dollars."

It is impossible to describe the magnificence of the

air with which she delivered herself of this statement. Self-satisfaction, pride, almost self-worship marked its every syllable. She looked to him for joy, congratulations, praise.

But to Hardwick it brought only the sense of unutterable defeat. Instead of giving him joy, it stamped upon him the feeling of incompetence. As he struggled to master these emotions, so that they should not be evident in his demeanor, Mrs. Hardwick improved the opportunity to dilate upon her achievement.

"I have but one regret in connection with the whole affair," she said, "and that is that I have not sooner turned to account what I may without undue vanity refer to as an unusual talent for leadership. It was made very plain to me, at the meeting of patronesses at Mrs. L. Percival Sedley's house, that I possess ability in this direction much out of the ordinary. As you know, all of the ladies present were members of our most exclusive families, whose names are known not only throughout the length and breadth of this city, but which, I may say, have a significance wherever great wealth and social position are recognized. And these women, accustomed to command, literally sat at my feet and listened to my words with rapt attention, anxious to follow my slightest suggestion.

"It is but a forerunner of what will happen in the larger gatherings which will attend my talks. Would you believe it, I have literally been besieged ever since

the news became public property. The telephone called me constantly for several days. Women with whom my acquaintance was so slight that I recalled their names with difficulty craved permission to subscribe to the course. It seems to me that I have always been far too modest. I have, so to speak, 'hid my light under a bushel'.

"But that day is past. Henceforth I shall turn my undoubted talents to account. This little series of talks is but the beginning of a career which promises not only an adequate return financially, but, what is more, a public recognition which, I do not hesitate to admit, will bring me the greatest delight. I know that it is quite usual to affect to scorn a tribute of this kind, but I look down upon such affectation, it is beneath me."

Hardwick listened in misery. This then was his reward. A life of hard, unremitting labor which had brought him nothing but debt and worry. He had put forth the best that was in him and now, in middle age, when his faculties were no longer in their prime, he had to take second place to his wife; he had to turn to her to relieve him from the ignominy of constant indebtedness, he must relinquish his position as the sole provider. And he wondered at the freak of fortune which, at one stroke, had put into her hands an amount equal to two years of his salary.

During the interval between Christmas and the first of the Thursdays upon which Mrs. Hardwick was to

begin her series of talks, her conversation, if so one-sided an affair may be thus called, was solely upon this one topic. And, with the constant repetition, Hardwick gradually lost the sense of sharp distress which the first announcement of his wife's great success had brought to him. However, it was still a sore spot in his consciousness and, when it came into his mind, he made a great effort to think of other things. But with the arrival of the first of Mrs. Hardwick's Thursdays, even this soreness had gone; he had become thoroughly accustomed to the new condition.

Before he left the house that morning, Hardwick had been strictly enjoined by his wife to be present at Wilberforce Hall in the afternoon. She wanted him to witness her triumph. He had demurred at the beginning, claiming that he did not care to absent himself from the office during business hours, but Mrs. Hardwick had scoffed at his protestations and had overridden them completely. In the end, he had given in and had promised to be present promptly at three, the hour which had been set.

There was no trace of nervousness visible in Mrs. Hardwick. She was as sure of herself as though this was to have been her thousandth rather than her first appearance in a large hall before an audience which had been keyed up to a high pitch of expectancy. She had given several days to preparation, using the daily papers and two weeklies, which gave her the information

which she required. As she had a really prodigious memory and almost perfect self-possession, it was necessary for her to make only the merest notes. With these in her hand, she felt herself fully equipped for the work and was actually ready to ask for questions upon any pertinent subject which might occur to any of her auditors.

"Now, Henry, my dear," she said, as she accompanied him to the door, "I count upon you to attend promptly. I am particularly anxious to have your view of the manner in which I comport myself. Not that I have any doubt of my ability to handle the situation, but I should like to have your impression."

"All right," he answered, and, kissing her, went down the street.

But the thought of his ill fortune persisted. Something was wrong with him, he felt; nothing went right. The last part of the catalogue, that which had been arranged after the responsibility for the prompt finishing of the work had been taken over by Pemberton, did not have the quality of lively interest shown in the earlier pages. He had struggled with them, he had endeavored to maintain his interest, but could not. He could not help feeling that it was no longer his catalogue; his sense of personal achievement, the ambition to make a great personal success were gone.

However, the work was being pushed by McCabe and there was now no doubt that, save for some extraor-

dinary misfortune, the book would be finished in time. Hardwick had seen the first forms and knew that the quality of the printing was all that could be expected.

There was another thing in his mind which gave him almost constant inquietude, and that was the thought of the sheet of McCabe's copy which Miss Henderson had inadvertently put into Ruth's hand. What did Miss Bernstein know? And what did she suspect? He thought over countless expedients to test her but rejected all of them as incriminating. She never came to him without causing him the fear that she was about to speak of the matter. He almost wished she would do so, he felt it would be a blessed relief.

It was almost constantly present in Ruth's mind also. There was no one with whom she felt free to discuss the matter, and, consequently, it haunted her thought, a spectre that would not down. She felt that she was assuming a responsibility by silence which was beyond her. Having no doubt whatever of Hardwick's guilt, she felt that he was unworthy to continue to hold his position, and yet she could not bring herself to talk of the matter to Pemberton. She knew well what that would mean; a searching examination into the details of the affair and then, the truth once established, the ruthless dismissal of Hardwick in such a manner that it would be practically impossible for him to hold any position of trust and responsibility in the community.

Finally, she decided that she would go to Hardwick himself at some favorable opportunity and ask him point blank whether her conviction of his guilt was justified. If he admitted it, she would advise him to resign his position and would promise her silence on the matter forever. If he denied it, well—she would see. But she felt that she must speak of it to someone and this seemed the only possible course.

It appeared, however, that the favorable opportunity which she had specified to herself never would come. Day after day she came to the office determined to make the opportunity if necessary, but on each day went home without having spoken.

The opportunity she sought came to her on this third of January immediately after her return from her lunch at quarter of two.

Hardwick was sitting at his desk when Ruth came in from lunch. The office was unusually quiet, most of the clerks were engaged at a considerable distance from Hardwick's desk, certainly out of earshot. This was Ruth's opportunity and she embraced it.

She was extremely nervous as she came over to him. The beating of her heart was painfully perceptible and she wondered whether the choking sensation that was upon her would permit speech. Hardwick was not aware of her presence until she actually stood by his chair, but, at the first sound of her voice, he was seized with terror. He knew that she was going to speak at

last, and he strove vainly to master his inward agitation as she asked him:

"May I speak to you for a few minutes, Mr. Hardwick?" she began. Never had she been so excited. She was struck by fright at her own temerity. She saw that her action might lay her open to a most painful rebuff and wished she had not begun. But the thought of withdrawing did not occur to her.

"Certainly," said Hardwick in a tone which he tried to make unconcerned. Whether he was successful or not made no difference, Ruth was far too agitated to observe it.

"There's a matter which has been worrying me for weeks and I feel I must speak to you about it." As she spoke, she grew somewhat calmer, but Hardwick's trouble continued to increase. He said nothing, so she went on:

"You may think it's none of my business, but please hear me out. I must talk to someone about the matter and I'm sure you'll agree that it will be far better for me to discuss it with you than with anyone else." She paused and looked at him.

"Go on," he said huskily. Oh! Would she never get down to the real thing? What was the use of all of these preliminaries?

"Some weeks ago Miss Henderson put in my hands a piece of advertising copy which I am sure she wrote for you. It was purely unintentional on her part, a mistake,

for she was much confused when I asked her what it was, and took it away without giving me any explanation." She paused again, at a loss just how to proceed. She was silent only for a second, but in that moment she saw the intense suffering which she was causing Hardwick. He looked at her fixedly, his face white, his lips bloodless under the pressure he exerted in his struggle to maintain his composure.

"Mr. Hardwick," Ruth resumed at length, "you wrote that advertising copy for Mr. McCabe and that was why you were willing to let him bid, and allowed him to make a substitution in the paper item, and wouldn't let the other printers revise their bids. You wrote that stuff for him to justify you in taking money from him, didn't you?"

"Yes," answered Hardwick. He was so utterly crushed that he did not even wonder how she had arrived at her conclusion. But one thought was in his mind now. In some way he must justify himself in her eyes. She had practically told him that she had spoken to no one about the matter and, in some obscure way, Hardwick knew that she spoke the truth.

"Yes," said Hardwick again after a momentary pause. "It's all true, but it isn't quite as bad as it sounds when you say it." He forced himself to hold to a dignified calmness, but in him his heart seemed to be beating furiously. Oh, if only he could disappear, if he could but be blotted out. Flight was the one thing which seemed

possible, but, nevertheless, he was chained there by something stronger than this instinct, compelled to make an attempt to justify himself although he knew in advance that it was useless.

"Will you listen to my explanation?" he asked. Ruth looked at him in pity. Never had she seen greater misery, and suddenly she was engulfed by a great wave of sympathy for him. Oh! she thought, how hard it is to know what to do. In her thought it had seemed so easy to decide between right and wrong; it was quite a simple matter to tell him to resign his position, but now it was altogether different. She hastened to reply, making her tone as reassuring as she knew how:

"Why, certainly, Mr. Hardwick."

Hardwick felt the sympathy she had aimed to express and quickly responded to it. He was in no doubt now as to what to say. He would tell her the whole transaction, omitting nothing, and then offer to resign. He was just about to begin when there was a ring of the telephone on Ruth's desk. She went over and picked up the receiver.

"Miss Bernstein speaking," he heard her say. And then, after a short pause, "Tell him I'll come immediately."

She turned to Hardwick, "Mr. Pemberton wishes to see me at once. Will you wait here until I return?"

"Yes," he answered, and she left.

CHAPTER XXVIII

AS soon as Ruth entered Pemberton's office he picked up his telephone and told the operator he was not to be disturbed. This took but a second and the receiver was already back on its hook when Ruth had closed the door behind her.

"Sit down, please," he said. "I want to have a serious talk with you."

Ruth, who was still much agitated, took a chair and looked at him expectantly. She did not trust her voice. Anyone who knew her would have seen instantly that she was not as usual, but Pemberton was too intent upon his own concerns for the moment to perceive the alteration in her demeanor. His glance was directed at her, but he did not see her, that is, he saw she was there, but no more.

At length he began to speak very slowly.

"Ruth," he said, "I know I shouldn't discuss the matter I have on my mind here now, but I really have no choice. I have to give a final decision this afternoon on a matter which depends on you. So I ask your pardon in advance, and hope you will hear me out." His manner was extraordinarily gentle. Never had she seen him so subdued, so bent upon holding himself in hand. As she made no answer, he went on.

"I have been asked to become one of the managers

of the Red Cross in France. Over there, there are enormous distributions of supplies to be made. It is an immense undertaking and they are short of the most important factor, executives of the right sort. Ordinary men are plentiful, they can get all they want of them. But the kind of men they want are scarce. In the first place they don't grow on every bush, and even when they find one that could fill the bill, he isn't often available." He paused and looked at her, and this time, trying to read the impression his words were making upon her, noted her agitation for the first time and promptly set it down to the effect of his communication.

"For some time," he continued, "the Red Cross people have been after me. I've always turned them down for a reason that you're no stranger to. Not that I wouldn't like to have the job, it's the sort of thing I know I could do, and, what's more, it's as important as anything in winning the war. You know the way I feel about the whole business, particularly about slackers. I never would care to go in, at my age, for real soldiering. Of course, I could go into a training camp and come out with a commission. But that's no way for me to help. I've got too good a head to waste it in taking orders from men who don't know anything.

"Anybody can be a lieutenant or a captain or a major, as I see it. But there aren't many who can manage a big organization and a half trained one at that in one of the biggest enterprises that has ever been attempted."

As he continued to speak, Ruth gradually overcame her perturbation, due to her absorption in what he had to say. It was always like this when he spoke to her. She was simply carried away by him. And now, although she had exacted his promise not to go away, she saw strong reasons for his going; she visualized him in the management of the Red Cross overseas, bringing order out of chaos, producing efficiency with incompetent helpers. As it grew upon her, she saw what was coming, the call for the decision she did not wish to make, and again she was agitated, but in a different way.

"This morning," Pemberton continued, "they were here again and almost begged me to accept. They put before me every possible inducement they could think of. It was with great difficulty that I avoided giving them a final answer, all I could succeed in doing with them was to put them off until this afternoon."

He stopped short this time, hoping that she would say something that would help him to go on. In view of his reiterated promise to her, he felt uncomfortable in the prospect of breaking it. But break it he felt he must and, as Ruth showed no disposition to talk, he went on:

"Ruth, I must decide now. We must decide now. I know I promised you to wait a year for your answer, and, under ordinary circumstances, I would do it. But this is different. Outside of you this is the most important thing that's ever come to me. I don't mean

in a business way or anything like that. You know what I mean, don't you?"

Ruth nodded her understanding. Slight as it was, it was the first encouragement she had given him, and he went on somewhat more easily.

"I want you to free me from my promise, and let me ask for my answer now. You must know it to-day as well as you ever can. Tell me, Ruth?" He got up from his chair and walked over to her, as though his proximity would help bring the answer he craved.

She looked up at him, an appealing expression in her face.

"Please sit down," she said. "Let me think."

He obeyed her and again sat at his desk, while she sat there silent, looking down. For several seconds they remained thus without motion, each busy with thought. But the silence weighed upon him, doubt was intolerable and he wished to press the decision, be it what it might.

"Ruth," he began.

"Please don't talk, Fred," she answered without looking up. "You must let me think."

And again there was silence.

Never had Ruth known such trouble. Within her was a struggle of powerful emotions. On the one hand, her undoubted love for this man, which had grown within her almost insidiously, despite the quiescence to which it had been compelled by the exercise of her

will, and, on the other, there was her fear of him, and her even greater fear of herself. She knew that, of the two, he must always be the master, that her very passion for him would abet the dominance which his strong personality gave him. And Ruth had always placed great emphasis upon her independence. She had always wanted to be and, in fact, had always been, self-sufficient. With him, however, there could be no independence; she would be his, his thing to do with as he pleased, and she knew, the decision once made, the ice once broken, that her love would forge even stronger fetters to bind her more securely.

And then there was Mrs. Bernstein. She saw now clearly that it must be one or the other. She knew the utter incompatibility between Pemberton and her mother. It would never be possible for them to meet continuously in peace in the narrow confines of one household. All along she had deceived herself in this regard; as long as she might postpone the final decision, she had deluded herself in the belief that time would bring them to a basis of understanding if not affection.

For more than a minute she sat in silence, vainly trying to weigh these opposing emotions. But there was no common basis for their appraisal; they persisted, each in its own way, irreconcilable, neither capable of entering into the domain of the other. And at last, only doubt was established, the sort of doubt which compelled a negative answer, a doubt which produced the

certainly of the misery of two rather than the misery of one. And in this doubt, in the impossibility of realizing the mandate of her body, which claimed this man, without the sacrifice of her mother's love, as it appeared to her, the silence became intolerable to her and she broke it.

"Fred," she said slowly, looking up at him. "I release you from your promise, but—" she could not go on.

The sound of her voice with an accent which proclaimed not only her love for him, but also the intense suffering she underwent, aroused in him a passion which threatened to break every bond. He looked at her and saw tears in her eyes, and an almost uncontrollable impulse seized him, urging him to go to her and take her in his arms, but he repressed it and awaited her further word.

"I cannot marry you," she said at length. "I see now that it is impossible, we would not be happy. We—"

"Ruth," he cried, "what do you mean? I would make you the happiest woman in the world. There is nothing I wouldn't do for you. Your slightest wish would be my law. And, as for me, with you as my wife there could be no unhappiness, it simply couldn't exist. Listen to me. You are the only woman in the world who ever meant anything at all to me. I thought at one time that I hated women, they seemed to be out of place in the world, I had no sympathy with their views, their interests, their ways. But you, Ruth, are

everything to me. If you'll but say the word, I'll turn down this proposition so flat that they won't have a single come-back. I'll do whatever you say. I'll wait for you, I'll do anything." He rose from his chair and would have come over to her, but she motioned him to stay away and he again sat down.

"No, Fred," she said slowly, the tears still in her eyes, "I cannot say the word. I was wrong, I should never have allowed you to hope. Take this position and forget that you ever knew me. It will be better for you to go away and to have this great, interesting work to do, it will make it easier for you to forget."

"Ruth," he cried, "you don't mean it. You can't mean it. You know you love me; you must know that I can make you happy. You must say 'yes'." And he held out his arms to her.

But she would not look at him and again repeated her refusal.

"No," she said. "You would not make me happy. The very truth of my love for you would make me unhappy. I must be free, I must go on with my life as it is, I cannot help it."

"You are talking nonsense," he said, and anger was evident in his voice.

"No, Fred," she replied. "It isn't nonsense. I've thought it all out and I know what I must do. I cannot marry you."

He listened to her in amazement. Was it possible that

he was to be defeated in this, the greatest ambition of his life? He, defeated; he, before whom everyone, everything had always yielded. He could not believe it, and yet she sat before him unshaken in her resolution, she, a mere girl in his eyes, withstanding all of his efforts to persuade her. His anger gained upon him, and he struggled to control it as he asked in a voice almost tremulous:

"Ruth, you don't mean that this is your final decision?"

"Yes, Fred," she answered, her head still bowed, "it is."

"Very well then," he said in a voice which he attempted to make cold, but which showed plainly the inward heat which consumed him, "I see I have been mistaken in you after all. I thought you were a real woman, one with real feeling and not a machine. You're a good clerk, the best clerk I've ever met, I'll say that, and I suppose you're a good housekeeper and all that sort of thing. You're smart enough to do anything you put your hand to, but you're only a machine after all. You're one of these new women, the sexless kind, who think that they're the real saviours of the world. They look down on marriage as something contemptible. That's the kind of a woman you are. You have a great idea of your importance, but actually, a hundred of you aren't worth one simple girl who doesn't know anything except that when she loves a man nothing

else counts, and she comes to him knowing that she'll find her happiness in him and that her real business in life is to be a wife and a mother.

"But you," he continued, and his anger lent a withering contempt to his tone, "you are superior to this kind of woman. You have brains and you pervert them. You think that business is your vocation. You make yourself believe that you're indispensable in the business world. You've educated yourself to the belief that you should look down upon your natural impulses and you've succeeded to the point where there's nothing left but the mere shell of a woman, the outside, with nothing behind it but a sexless creature who doesn't know what love really is; who has no conception of the beauty of motherhood—a barren, empty husk."

He rose from his desk and walked up and down the office for a moment, and then suddenly sat down again.

Ruth had heard him begin with surprise and listened to him as he continued in ever growing amazement. Finally, anger and resentment gained her as well, and, although she made a valiant effort to restrain them, her voice as she answered him was pitched high, a thing utterly unusual with her.

"I shan't attempt to answer you," she began, speaking very rapidly. "There is no use defending myself. Perhaps it's even better that you should think of me as you say. It's funny though that you, of all men, should call *me* a machine, you, who have always gone

on your way relentlessly, crushing everybody and everything which opposed you. You're the machine, not the sexless thing you called me, but a machine for all that. All of the finer human qualities are strangers to you. You're honest and truthful, and, according to your way of looking at things, just. But generosity, and gentleness, and charity are only names to you—the names of amiable weaknesses of others. You say you never were interested in any woman until you met me. Did you ever stop to think why this was so? Well, I'll tell you. It's because you were afraid of them; you felt you couldn't trust them. You put everything on the basis of self-interest, and you couldn't see where that came into relations with the other sex. Everything with you is judged by the same standard; what are you going to get out of it, or what is the other fellow going to get. If you had any sense of humor, and God knows you haven't, you'd see that all of your calculation isn't worth the trouble it takes; you'd see that the people you come into contact with simply have to do what you want because you're self-willed and strong; stronger, much stronger than they are." She paused for breath, her bosom heaving, while he sat there, silent, looking at her intently with wonder in his eyes. She looked at him in surprise; never before had she seen him so cast-down and, even in the excitement of her angry resentment, she began to feel pity for him, even while she went on with her denunciation. Although

moved by this pity to mitigate the severity of her arraignment, she felt impelled to continue, now that she had begun, and to continue to the bitter end.

"And then I came into your life and for once you found a woman whom you could trust, a woman whom you wanted for yourself. What was it? Do *you* know what it was that made you want her, that made you trust her? I don't doubt that you figured it all out to your own satisfaction. But can you tell me what your calculation is worth? When you were all through with it, did you know any more than when you began? Of course not. But you wouldn't admit it. You are too proud, too vain to admit that there's anything bigger and stronger than you.

"And did you think of me? Did you consider my part of the bargain? Never. You took that for granted. You wanted me, and that was enough. My happiness was to be a matter of course because you felt that marrying me was necessary to *your* happiness. Just a moment ago you said that you would do anything for me, and I believe you would, now, when you want me and haven't got me. But if I were married to you, you'd do anything for me that I wanted, provided it was something you were satisfied to have me want. You can't help it, that's what you are, it's the way you were made. Why, you think if you had me, you'd be happy. That's foolish. Happiness doesn't come that way. You'll never be happy, because it isn't in you."

Again she paused for breath, but her mounting excitement would not permit her to stop for more than a moment.

“Did you ever stop to consider me? Did you ever think of me as a person apart from you? Did you ever consider that I had an individuality apart from your vision of me as your wife? Did you ever think what my love for you would bring into *my* life? Did it occur to you that that love would make me unhappy instead of happy? No, for you don’t think that way. That night, on the way home from the theatre, when you kissed me, when you forced me to show you what I was bent on concealing, did you think of my part, of the reasons which made me crush down my love for you so that I might not forget what I owed to my sense of duty? No, you were thinking only of yourself, you wanted me and I was unwatchful, so you took me unawares. You did not act on reason then, you did not calculate, you just took me and—” She could not go on, her excitement had reached the point of hysteria and she buried her face in her hands, weeping convulsively, all control gone.

In a moment he was by her side, his hand on her shoulder.

“Come, Ruth,” he said gently, and would have added more but knew not what to say. His touch, however, was potent, not to make her calm, but to break down finally the barrier of her reserve which had so long withstood him. Punctuated by sobs, she went on:

"Oh! I love you. I do love you and I can't give you up. I don't care what happens; I don't care what you do to me, I love you and I won't give you up."

In her excitement she seized his hand and covered it with kisses. Gently, he disengaged it, and, almost lifting her to her feet, took both of her hands in his.

"Look at me, Ruth," he said.

"Oh! What must you think of me!" she cried, her head still bowed, her body still shaken by sobs.

"You know what I think of you," he said gravely, and then went on, "Ruth, did you mean what you said just now?"

But she did not answer.

"Ruth," he said again, "did you mean what you have just said? I know you were terribly excited and perhaps you did not know just what you were saying. Tell me, it means everything to me." His tone was one of infinite pleading.

No word came from her. For a brief moment she stood there, her head bowed, her hands in his, and then, disengaging them, she placed her arms about his neck and laid her head on his shoulder.

"Oh! Fred, I love you," was all she said.

For fully a minute they stood thus and then they kissed; a long, rapturous kiss that set the seal of finality upon their plighted troth. And then, suddenly, they simultaneously remembered that they were in a business office and withdrew from each other's embrace. There

was no need of explanation. Each forgot the bitter arraignment of the other of but a few minutes earlier.

Ruth, in her new found certainty, was almost perfectly happy. Only the least bit of anxiety at the prospect of breaking the news to her mother tempered what would have been perfect bliss.

They resumed their chairs and discussed their plans for the future at great length. Suddenly, she remembered that she had told Hardwick to wait for her.

"What time is it?" she asked.

He looked at his watch.

"Ten minutes to four."

"Oh! Lord," she cried. "Have I been here two hours? I told Mr. Hardwick I would be back in a few minutes. I must run."

"Wait a minute," he said. "Am I to come up to-night?"

"Surely!" she cried, and fled.

CHAPTER XXIX

IT came into Hardwick's mind, immediately after Ruth had left him, to put on his hat and coat and go away, out of the office, out of the city, anywhere that might save him from ever again seeing anyone whom he had ever known. It was but a momentary impulse, dismissed almost as soon as it appeared, but it was a most natural one.

He fancied that he was forever disgraced. The one thing which he felt he had always possessed was gone, his good name, the respect to which he had always felt entitled. Ruth's accusation appeared to him to be that of the whole world, it seemed as though the finger of public scorn was pointed at him, and that he cowered under it, guilty, convicted of petty theft.

As he anxiously awaited her return, he began to phrase his explanation in his mind. And as he went on with it, he readily found excuses, nay, reasons to justify his action. After all, what had he done? He had admitted McCabe to competition for the catalogue, through which the company would save one thousand dollars. He told himself that he had not been led to do it by reason of McCabe's giving him the opportunity to earn a little money on the side. That had nothing to do with it; the two things had merely coincided in point of time. There was no intrinsic wrong in his using his

own leisure for the purpose of supplementing his income, certainly not when the work he did in no way interfered with the earnings or prestige of his employer. His reason for not re-opening the competition was perfectly good; there was no time to lose, they were already late in awarding the contract for printing.

Gradually, with thoughts like these, his aplomb returned and he wished for Ruth's coming so that he might justify himself in her eyes. He knew instinctively that, were she satisfied, the matter would be dropped. Had she not told him that he was the only one to whom she felt she could speak about the matter? And this could only mean that she had kept her own counsel, and, once she was convinced of his perfect honesty in the transaction, would continue to do so.

But the minutes went by and she did not return. He became restless and, in the effort to remain unperturbed, tried to busy himself with some unfinished work on his desk. The effort was a vain one, however, and presently he laid the papers he was reading to one side. He could think of but one thing and that was how he should justify himself in Ruth's eyes.

And as the subject turned and turned again in his mind, the weaknesses of his defense became more and more apparent. In imagination he could see the cool scrutiny in her eyes, as she listened to him; he could almost phrase her sharp, succinct questions which would riddle his show of justification. He saw that it was

useless, he had deceived only himself; he could never hope to deceive her. He was a ruined man, there was nothing left.

Literally in agony, he sat at his desk suffering the deepest despair he had ever known. All of his life he had vacillated between the extremes of hope and despondency, the former largely in the majority, but now he sounded a greater depth than ever. There seemed no way out, no possible means for him to re-establish hope, no basis for his future self-respect.

And then, suddenly, he laughed at himself. Why should he fear this girl's opinion? Let her tell Pemberton if she wished, she might tell the whole world. At most it was a trifling, venial offense, if it were really an offense at all. Practical men would laugh at it. Let her come back then and he would make his explanation. If it satisfied her, well and good. If not, he would defy her and Pemberton, too. This wasn't the only job in the world.

He got up and walked about the office pretending to be looking for something so that his restlessness might not be noticed by the clerks in the room. He pulled out his watch and saw that it was after half-past two.

Suddenly he remembered his promise to his wife to attend her talk at three o'clock, and told himself that he would await Ruth's return no longer than quarter to three.

But when quarter to three came without her reappear-

ance, he did not go, and, what was now plainly apparent to him, he would not go. He must see her, he must explain the whole matter to her so that he might be sure that she would tell no one, that the secret would be locked safely in her bosom.

And as the minutes slipped by, he thought of his past experience, his change from one occupation to another, always with the hope of an improvement which he never was able to realize. Always had he been the victim of circumstances, never their master. His whole career had been a series of disappointments; either the man upon whom he had counted failed him or the opportunity he looked for was lacking.

Was it ill luck solely? Was it possible that so long, so constant a succession of failures could be purely fortuitous? It did not seem possible, and yet, could there be any other reason? If there was, it was not due to any failing of his, of that he was sure. It was true that there had been occasional lapses, none, however, of a serious nature, in which he may not have taken the best advantage of an offered opportunity, but that was all.

But was it? Could he be mistaken and ignorant of the truth? Ignorant or ignoring, did it matter which? Ah! Yes, it did, and was there really something in him which he had persistently ignored, which he had rigorously avoided recognizing?

And the minutes still slipped by as he sat at his desk,

now calm, but with the calmness of settled despair. One by one, he reviewed his failures, his misfortunes, he had been wont to call them, but now they stood out in a clearer light. They were misfortunes, it was true, but they were those which come persistently only to the weak in spirit, those who shrink from the battle and go into action with defeat in their hearts.

Bitterly he went over his more recent experience, that with his present employer, beginning with his first interview with Pemberton. What was it that made him cringe before him? Was it that Pemberton had a better mind; that he was quicker to see his interest, more agile? No, for even in that interview Hardwick had known just what Pemberton was doing and why he was doing it. Why then had he allowed himself to be put upon if he was aware of the tactics of the other? How could he have maintained his self-respect, and he had retained it, if he was willing to come out of that negotiation docile, a willing subject to the imposed force of Pemberton? He remembered that all of his readiness, his wit had been employed to justify his acquiescence on the ground of the superiority of his opponent and his own needs.

Why had he not opposed him? Why had he not insisted on his value and spurned the contemptible offer which he had so cravenly accepted? Why? Why? Was it fear? Fear of what? Certainly not personal violence. That would be ridiculous. In that respect, he

knew instinctively that he was the equal of any man. But perhaps it was another kind of fear, the fear of self-consciousness, the fear of the unexpressed opinion of those with whom he came into contact, which held his tongue still when they ruthlessly disposed of his fortunes, rather than have them think him deficient in some respect, he couldn't think what. No, that wasn't it either, although he felt that he had often been guilty of omission to press his recognized interests for this poor reason.

It was not only Pemberton. Albright and many others had so used him, had set his concerns to one side in his own presence in order to push their own. Even McCabe, he now saw clearly, had used him. All of them had compelled his silence, his acceptance of what they were willing to yield while they took what they wanted for themselves.

As he turned these bitter thoughts in his mind, he again took out his watch and noted that it was after three o'clock. Well, he would wait, he would learn what the immediate future held for him. He no longer wondered what detained Ruth, he was interested so deeply in his introspection.

What was it then that gave these men the mastery over him? In the case of Pendleton, in the advertising agency, he saw now most distinctly that, had he insisted on his rights, he would have carried his point. But he had allowed Pendleton to anger him, although

he knew full well that that was Pendleton's object, and in the end had done exactly what was wanted of him, made the offer of his resignation.

Could it be that he was weaker than they, not weaker in intellect, but less forceful, weaker in will? Of course, of any two men, one must be the stronger; one of the two must be able to impose his will on the other, by some process completely inscrutable, some power inherent in its possessor, which came to him naturally and was not the result of his own effort, like the shape of one's hand.

But then if, of any two men, one must be the stronger, would it not be likely that the weaker, when he was one of another couple, might be the stronger? And the stronger in the first couple might be the weaker in a third.

However, it seemed to Hardwick, as he reviewed one experience after another, that he was always the weaker, that it was always his will that yielded before the superior power of the other. Could it be then that he was not fit to cope with other men in the struggle for place and wealth; that he was invariably doomed to defeat, no matter what amount of thought and effort he might put into the fight?

And this weakness was not confined to negativing his chance of success when his ambition, his desires were pitted against those of other men. It went further, it made sustained effort in any direction impossible.

Just to go back over his most recent history, was it not true that, after his first advertising campaign for the Prescott Company, the success of which was golden in promise for his future, he relapsed into a state in which lively effort seemed impossible? And after the first start of the new catalogue, had his interest not flagged? He remembered now that always he had been like this, and he remembered, too, that it had been his wont to consider it leniently as appropriate to the temperamental character ascribed to creative artists.

He saw the truth clearly now. No longer could he delude himself with phrases, the day was past when he might accept self-justification at the price of poor excuses. The humiliating truth, bitter as it was, stood before him in sharp outline, bare and utterly convincing.

He was a failure. He was neither competent as a business man nor as an artist. All of his life he had indulged in the delusion that he was a man of affairs, equal in ability to any other, lacking only the opportunity to prove his quality. It mattered not whether it was his own fault or was born in him, the fact was there, inexpugnable, unassailable.

And there was no basis upon which to hope for any betterment in the future. He would always be a failure; he would always sow, but never reap. If he were to contend to-day, now, with Pemberton, the end would surely be his defeat.

And utter despondency held him. He saw before him,

for the rest of his life, the continuous ordeal of Sisyphus. Always must he begin over again after each new defeat to face defeat again and still defeat.

What was the use of further effort? Could he even make the effort, knowing that it was foredoomed to failure? Would it not be better to end it all, to do away with himself, and thus remove forever, in this culminating confession of supreme incompetence, the pain of ever recurring failure?

No longer did he note the passage of time as he sat there, his head bowed over his desk in an anguish of spirit such as he had never imagined could be the portion of any man.

With the final recognition of his inherent incapability, with the tragedy of his utter self-revelation, his every interest vanished and there was nothing left but an inflamed sensibility to excruciating pain. No longer did he think, no longer did he probe his wound, he simply suffered.

And then Ruth returned and stood before him, a Ruth joyous, transfigured, such as he had never known. But he did not perceive the change in her. All he saw was his questioner, and the instinct of self-preservation leaped into action. He saw she was there and he hastened to speak. He scarcely heard her say:

"Oh! Mr. Hardwick, I'm so sorry I've kept you waiting. Mr. Pemberton had a very important matter to discuss with me and I lost all track of time."

"I've been thinking over what we were talking about," he began, scarcely conscious of her words. "I want to explain my side of it and then, if you can't see it the way I do, I suppose the only thing to do will be for me to offer my resignation."

As he spoke, his courage returned in part and he looked at her searchingly to gauge the effect of what he had said. What he saw utterly surprised him. Instead of the reserved woman of affairs who, but two hours before, had charged him with a serious breach of business ethics, he saw before him a smiling girl, joyful, filled with the zest of life at its highest.

"Oh! Mr. Hardwick," she said gaily, "let's not say any more about that matter. I've thought of it since I spoke to you, and I believe we had better forget it."

"But Miss Bernstein," he answered, bewildered, with a relief that entered into his every fibre, "I can't let the matter rest that way. I couldn't see you every day, and—"

"But you won't see me every day," she said with wonderful cheerfulness, "I'm not going to remain here. I'm giving up this position in a few days. I'm going to retire to private life."

"What's that?" he said in great surprise. "Did you say you were leaving?"

"Yes," she answered, smiling. "I'm going in a few days. Just as soon as you can find someone to take up my work."

"Well, this is a great surprise," he said, very much interested, wishing that she would give him some opportunity to ask the reasons for her leaving. But she did not, and, instead, gave him a new shock.

"Mr. Pemberton is leaving, too," she said.

"Pemberton! Leaving?" he gasped.

"Yes, Mr. Pemberton is going to France in a few days. So you needn't consider him either. Just forget it, please, and above all, forget that I ever bothered you about it."

"Very well," he said. "I don't understand what has changed your mind, but if you are perfectly sure—" He hesitated, and Ruth finished the sentence, although he did not understand her meaning.

"I'm sure," she said, "sure at last," and left him.

He watched her go to her desk and set to work and then, suddenly, the thought of his promise to his wife came to him. He looked at his watch, it was four o'clock.

"I'm going for the day," he said to Ruth, who looked up at the sound of his voice. Picking up his coat and hat, he came over to her desk, and added:

"You know Mrs. Hardwick is giving the first of a series of talks at Wilberforce Hall this afternoon and I promised I'd look in."

"Yes," answered Ruth, "mother is going. I hope it will be a great success."

"Thank you," he said, and left the office.

As he hurried out of the building, he was conscious

of a buoyancy, a youthful energy that seemed to him to give the lie utterly to his recent dismal thoughts. As he hurried down the street he saw an empty taxicab, hailed it and was driven rapidly to Wilberforce Hall.

CHAPTER XXX

THE bitter cold of this January day made the warmth and coziness of Wilberforce Hall all the more grateful to Hardwick, as he entered and looked in vain for a seat. The term coziness may seem out of place in the description of a hall large enough to seat nearly a thousand people. To Hardwick, however, as he looked over the closely packed auditorium, and the stage upon which his wife stood, backed by a double row of occupied chairs, there came the sense of intimate comfort to which the word applies.

Almost the whole of the audience was composed of women, the few men scattered among them sank into insignificance. As Hardwick took in the picture that met his eyes, his impression was that of a mass of extremely well dressed women, and he was conscious of a mixture of perfumes, indefinite because of the medley of many kinds, and the decided odor of furs.

Mrs. Hardwick was speaking as he entered and the audience was giving the closest attention to her words. So silent were they, so quiet, that it seemed to Hardwick that she was not putting into her voice more than its ordinary strength. She was completely composed, utterly mistress of herself and obviously happy. He noted that the unctuous quality of tone usual with her was greatly emphasized. There spoke in it a great

condescension to her listeners, as though this was the utterance of an oracle; and the absorption of the audience, as it hung upon her every word, bespoke their acceptance of her pronouncements at her own valuation.

Hardwick, in his new found freedom from worry, in the recoil from the abyss of gloom into which he had lately been plunged, had his mind free to consider the prospect before him. And he wondered at it and, principally, wondered at her. After eighteen years of marriage, he learned that he did not yet know his wife. This woman, who stood there before him, carrying her audience with her, was a new personage to him. He had never suspected this power in her, and, as he thought of it, it came to him that she also had been unconscious of it. He was familiar with her whole history, the greater part because he had, in a sense, shared it, and the rest because in her constant volubility every item of it had been told him in frequent repetition.

She had always been fond of books, and had always been a great though not a judicious reader. That aspect of it had meant little or nothing to him because he was scarcely a reader at all, and was certainly not attracted by the type of literature which interested his wife. Her education, that part of it which she had received in schools, was limited, and the rest had come mainly from books. She did not learn much in her conversations with others outside of what came to her in the crystal-

lization of her own impressions in speech. But Hardwick did not know this, nor had he ever speculated upon the subject in general. He did not know that she was ill-informed upon most subjects, which were those upon which she had any information whatever, and, in his mind, she was an exceptionally well educated woman.

But even then, although he had had a vast experience of her readiness in expression, he had never fancied in her this power of leadership, this mastery. And he was vaguely jealous of her success; he felt that it diminished his standing in the world. This was not a clear thought, it was but the reflection of a slight irritation which the spectacle of her success imposed on him.

Mrs. Hardwick was closing some remarks on the Russian situation as he entered, and, when she had paused, after asking the audience if there were any more questions on the subject under discussion, there was a short silence, during which Mrs. Hardwick stood in an expectant attitude, while the tension of the audience relaxed and there was the faint buzz of whispered remarks from many places in the hall.

Directly in front of him he heard a young woman say to her neighbor:

"Isn't she wonderful? She seems to know everything, doesn't she?"

"She talks very well," was the answer, "but I don't think my husband would agree with her in some of her opinions."

Hardwick was annoyed at the presumption of the answer. What right had this woman to question?

"What subject?" asked the first speaker.

"Oh! about the labor situation. You know that Mr. Purvis has very strong opinions on that subject. Why only the other evening—"

Just then there was a sudden silence and everyone's attention was directed to a young woman in the centre of the hall, who had risen from her seat and was about to put a question to Mrs. Hardwick. She was very fair, and very blonde, characteristics which were emphasized by the heavy rimmed tortoise shell glasses which she wore. She was evidently much embarrassed by the stillness which her rising had occasioned, and seemed to have difficulty in controlling her voice.

"Mrs. Hardwick," she said, "I saw in the paper this morning that the Bolsheviks have turned over to the Germans guns which the Allies sent to Russia. You didn't mention it in your talk and I wondered if they had any right to do such a thing." She sat down abruptly. It had evidently been a great effort.

Mrs. Hardwick answered her with perfect seriousness.

"I am afraid that the state of war is one in which all ethical considerations have small respect, and in which the ordinary rules of conduct are suspended. We have heard the saying that 'All is fair in love and war,' and that seems to be the basis upon which all belligerent nations determine their course of action. There are,

however, well-established principles which are known as the rules of war, but which, I am afraid, in the present conflict, are more honored in the breach than in the observance. In answer to your question, therefore, I should say that it is quite within the right of the Germans to make use of any of the machinery of war which may fall into their hands, as we should consider it within ours to do a similar thing. Are there any more questions?" she concluded, beaming upon her audience with her most benevolent expression.

Apparently there were none, and again there was a recurrence of the buzz of whispered conversation all over the hall. Mrs. Hardwick waited for perhaps half a minute and then spoke.

"Ladies and Gentlemen," she said loudly, and the buzz ceased instantly, "I must thank you for your attention this afternoon. It has been a proud and happy day for me and I should like to take a few minutes of your time to tell you about it. I am sure that you will bear with me for a brief moment because you have shown by your enthusiastic approbation of the idea contained in the proposition to give this series of talks on current topics, that you were moved by a lively interest in the great affairs of the day and that, if you did not *know* that I possessed the qualities necessary to entitle me to act as an authoritative interpreter of contemporary history, you were willing to give me the opportunity to demonstrate whether or not I was so gifted.

“When I proposed this series to my dear friend, Mrs. L. Percival Sedley,” Mrs. Hardwick here turned and looked at the lady she had just named, one of those seated on the stage, “she met my modest and almost timorous announcement with the warm-hearted enthusiasm and encouragement which have made successful so many ventures undertaken in the public interest. She took up the proposition with her usual energy and promptly enlisted in its behalf the co-operation of the ladies whose names appear in the list of patronesses. With characteristic modesty, Mrs. Sedley made no change in my plans, but lent her great name and influence to their furtherance, in the exact form in which I had devised them.

“Until to-day I have, no doubt, been a stranger to many of you. I have lived obscurely in the bosom of my family, devoting myself to the discharge of those housewifely duties which are the proud portion of all women true to the ideals of their sex. Never, however, have I permitted my interest in what are justly considered as the higher activities of life, those of the mind and the development of learning, the arts and literature, to languish.

“It is the last of these that has always claimed attention in my spare hours. I have devoted myself to acquiring a full mind by mastering the contents of those marvelous works which are the true monuments of the greatness of our race. The history of nations

as interpreted by the greatest minds of all ages, has been the pabulum upon which my mind has constantly been fed. It has always appeared to me that the surest way in which to appraise the events in which we are actually concerned, the history, so to speak, which we make from day to day, was by an understanding of what has happened in the past. Manners vary and customs change; invention alters the usages of mankind, but man himself is unchanged, his instincts, his emotions remain the same.

“And so, in the history of all nations and all ages, I have tried to read the meaning of the movements, of the struggle which has convulsed the world today. That I have in part succeeded is attested by your attention, by your unfeigned interest in my words. Every drop of the midnight oil which I have spent in acquiring the comparatively poor store of knowledge which has made possible the exposition of the views upon topics of current interest which I have offered to you to-day in all modesty, has been returned to me a thousand fold in your undisguised cordial approbation.

“And therefore, if before to-day I have been a stranger to many of you, I feel I am so no longer. And my feeling towards you is that I am in the presence of true friends. I feel the greeting which your hearts extend to me is all the more cordial because it is inarticulate. But my position here, as speaker, gives me no such privilege. I am compelled to put into words, into halting phrase,

that which really is beyond the power of verbal expression. But I am emboldened by the warm sympathy which I feel you hold towards me to believe that you will take my words as symbols merely of an emotion much more powerful than they can carry. I can only thank you. You have made me a happy woman."

THE END

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